DOMESTIC LABOUR AND THE CAPITALIST MODE OF PRODUCTION: A THEORETICAL AND HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

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Summary

In advanced capitalist economies, a considerable proportion of society's labour-power is expended in the performance of unpaid labour in the household. The domestic labour performed in the homes of the working class, mainly but not exclusively by women, is the subject of this thesis.

Part One deals with theoretical questions concerning the existence and nature of domestic labour as a form of production. In it I attempt to develop a Marxist, that is, a historical materialist, analysis of domestic labour that suffers neither from functionalism nor idealism. To a great extent, new theoretical analyses grow out of the critique of already existing ones. The chapters in Part One reflect this: I present a political economy of domestic labour and an analysis of it's historical origin in the context of a critique of both Materialist Feminist theory and the Domestic Labour Debate.

Part Two contains three studies in the historical development of domestic labour in 19th and 20th century Britain. Three themes are present throughout: the changing nature of the domestic labour process and the means of production employed; the relationship between working class struggle and the development of household labour; the relationship between the development of domestic labour and the social position of women.

My analysis is based on the study of Marxist political economy and secondary source research into the history of working class household labour. It's originality lies principally in it's method of approach. To date, studies of domestic labour have generally suffered from theoretical or empirical exclusivity. The development of a detailed and rounded historical materialist analysis through the interaction of historical and theoretical research sets this thesis apart from contributions to the Domestic Labour Debate and other studies in the household labour studies tradition. This approach has led to new conclusions in relation to the political economy, the historical origin, and the historical development, of domestic labour.

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PART ONE

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF DOMESTIC LABOUR

INTRODUCTION

In 1980 the editor of a book entitled Women and Household Labour was able to remark in the Preface, "the number of people engaged in research on household labour may well be reaching the 'critical mass' so necessary to the intellectual vitality of any research tradition" (Berk 1980 p.17). This tradition, no more than fifteen years old at that time,(1) has had some impact on social science teaching in the universities and colleges of the West but as Ann Oakley, a pioneer in the field, has stated, "the extent to which the study of housework has been integrated with the main concerns of sociology (and other disciplines) has been disappointing" (Berk 1980 p.12). Nevertheless, increasing numbers of students of sociology, social history and (to a lesser extent) economics are at least introduced to the idea that work in industrialised societies is not an exclusively market or wage-labour phenomenon, and that contrary to the conventional wisdom shared by the academic and non-academic worlds alike, one can legitimately apply the concepts 'work', 'labour', and even 'production', to the unpaid labour of women in the home.

Under the broad heading 'household labour studies' one can include the work of a wide variety of scholars who share the common starting point, even where this is not stated explicitly, that unpaid household labour in industrialised societies should not be ignored

or trivialised but considered a subject for serious study in its own right. However, this shared premise has given rise to very different treatments of the subject; four types of study or approaches to the subject can be identified which I shall refer to as the four strands in the tradition.

The first strand is the study of the social position and perceptions of housewives, as opposed to the study of their labour per se. This includes personalised accounts of being a housewife such as Suzanne Gail's The Housewife (1968) and Pat Mainardi's The Politics of Housework (1980), as well as sociological studies of groups of housewives.(2) One early British survey, Hanna Gavron's The Captive Wife (1966), explored the life experiences of young married women at home with young children. However, in that study childcare and 'running the home' were not treated primarily as work activities. Ann Oakley's 1971 survey of London housewives marked a change in approach. Her specific concern was housework as a work process, and her intention was to examine women's attitudes to their work in the home in the way other sociologists had studied wage earners' work attitudes. Oakley's books based on that research, The Sociology of Housework (1974), and Housewife (1974), did much to promote the importance and legitimacy of housework as a subject, and her critique of the traditional functionalist approach to women and the family exposed the sexist assumptions upon which conventional sociology is based.(3) Meg Luxton's (1980) study of working class housewives in a

Canadian mining community represented the development of this approach to household labour. She focused in detail on the household labour process and related the empirical study of this labour, and women's attitudes to it, to some of the theoretical questions posed by the treatment of housework as vital labour in advanced capitalist societies.

Luxton's approach overlaps with a second type of study in the tradition - the detailed examination of housework as a set of labour tasks making up a labour process, often considered from a historical perspective. In the 1980s three notable books, one dealing with Britain and two with the United States, have been published: Caroline Davidson's A Woman's Work is Never Done: A history of housework in the British Isles 1650-1950 (1982), Susan Strasser's Never Done: A history of American Housework (1980(a)) and Ruth Schwartz Cowan's More Work for Mother: The ironies of household technology from the open hearth to the microwave (1983). As the third title suggests, these studies are concerned with the historical development of the material conditions, utilities, tools, appliances, and raw materials - in short, the means of production for household labour. This approach generally excludes childcare from its frame of reference and deals with the familiar female housework tasks - cooking, cleaning, laundry, obtaining provisions and so on. The texts referred to form part of a larger literature specialising in the relationship between technology, technological change and household labour.(4)

To some degree the literature of the second strand overlaps with that of the third, namely, time-budget studies which are in turn associated with some non-Marxist economists' attempts to establish the monetary 'value' of household labour. Since the 1920s in fact, a number of economists and sociologists have been interested in the amount of time spent in housework, and whether this has decreased following technological advance in the home. The question was posed: if it were paid labour, how much would it be worth, and what contribution would it make to national economic indexes, particularly the GNP? The first time-budget, or time-allocation, studies were conducted in the United States and Scandinavia but recent decades have seen the proliferation of studies measuring household labour-time in North America, Europe and Japan.(5) Data from large scale surveys are now available, but comparisons between surveys remains problematic because the methodologies employed vary considerably both in terms of definitions and the methods of measurement used.

Finally, there is the 'theoretical' approach to household labour. Its introduction requires the contextualisation of the whole household labour studies tradition. It is no accident that academic work on household labour mushroomed from the late 1960s and early 1970s, the period which saw the rise of Women's Liberation Movements in North America and Western Europe, as well as a revival of interest in Marxism, and Marxist political economy in particular, as explanations were sought for the onset of world economic recession. The immediate political

concern of the Women's Liberation Movement was the development of strategy and tactics for women's emancipation. This rapidly gave rise to calls for theory, for a Feminist explanation of the fundamental causes of women's oppression. The position of women in the family was identified as being of crucial importance and thus a key subject for theoretical work. Linked with the renewed interest in Marxism among layers of students and intellectuals, Feminist theory in all its variants penetrated academia as part of an assault on traditional social scientific paradigims. Like other strands in the tradition, the study of women's household labour from a theoretical perspective was stimulated by, and in turn encouraged, these developments.

At the centre of this fourth approach is a debate dealing with questions thrown up by the assertion that household labour is labour of a socially essential kind. The Domestic Labour Debate, as it came to be known, comprises a large number of articles written since the late 1960s, in which this labour is treated as a form of production. The contributors have been largely concerned to prove or disprove the applicability of Marx's theoretical categories of political economy to this form of production. For most Feminists, Marxist-Feminists and Marxists who have participated in this Debate, the position of women as unpaid domestic labourers within the family represents one, or the, essential factor in their oppression, and the relevance or not of Marxism for an understanding of this household labour is deemed decisive

in the advancement of either a class or gender based struggle for female emancipation. The Debate has been subject to a critique, on the one hand for being narrowly theoretical, methodoligically flawed and ahistorical, and on the other hand for placing undue emphasis upon domestic labour as the key factor in women's oppression.(6)

Having briefly introduced the four strands comprising the household labour research tradition, it remains to make two further preliminary remarks before situating the analytic content of this thesis. First, this tradition has not been consciously moulded or clearly defined within the social sciences. If one can call it a tradition, it exists as an unorganised literature, primarily in article form, scattered in the journals of several disciplines and political publications. Relatively few books have been published which examine in detail one or other aspect of household labour.(7) Secondly, literature dealing with housework and childcare is not, of course, confined to the household labour studies tradition. Obviously it is a subject touched upon and discussed in many other connections, both academic and non-academic, not least, in popular literature for women. More important, the studies to which I have referred are, in fact, part of an older but fragmented and partially buried tradition. The Feminist and Labour Movements of the past did produce some books and articles on different aspects of the subject.(8)

This thesis is a contribution to the study of household labour which draws upon all four stands in the

recent tradition and relevant literature from the past. It is an attempt to do two things from within a Marxist perspective. One is the elaboration of a theoretical analysis of unpaid household labour common to all capitalist societies.(9) The other is the presentation of three studies in the historical development of household labour based on the 19th and 20th century British experience. The method of presentation adopted involves the separation of the theoretical and historical chapters into Parts One and Two respectively. However, the two are not analytically separate; in my research and thinking the theoretical and historical analyses grew together. Well founded criticisms have been made concerning the ahistorical and abstract character of the Domestic Labour Debate. On the other hand, the published histories of household labour, the time-budget studies and the sociological studies of housewives, are generally devoid of any theoretical framework. The historical studies presented here are informed by, and in turn inform, the theoretical treatment of household labour as a form of production. This interaction between theory and history is discussed in some detail in the concluding chapter.

Apart from any other criteria, this thesis should be judged as an attempt to apply the Marxist method of inquiry and exposition to a sphere of social production not systematically analysed by Marx himself. The system of political economy developed by him is the foundation upon which the analysis is built. This foundation comprises not only the economic categories and laws of motion associated

with the capitalist form of production, but also the scientific method employed in their discovery. Thus no apology is made for the many references to Marx's writings, especially Capital Volume One.

This statement of my theoretical perspective is necessary because it informs the closer definition of the phenomenon to be studied. It is not women's unpaid household labour in general that is examined, but unpaid labour in the homes of the working class performed in the main, but not exclusively, by women.(10) The subject is the household labour performed by the working class for the reproduction of itself, and hence, of its commodity, labour-power. Thus the working class family, or household, is at the centre of the theoretical and historical analysis. I argue in Chapter One that an analytical distinction must be made between domestic labour per se and 'women's household labour' if the reasons for the existence of the household form of production, and the roots of the sexual division of labour, are to be understood.

Chapter One examines the conceptual and methodological approaches to domestic labour exemplified in the work of two Feminist theorists and in the Domestic Labour Debate. To these approaches I counterpose the need for an analysis based upon historical materialist premises.

In Chapter Two, I present my political economy of domestic labour. This chapter is premised on the view, as is the Debate, that household labour constitutes a form

of production as opposed to an activity of consumption.(11) There is no doubt that Marx, while making an analytical abstraction from household production in Capital for reasons I discuss, recognised working class domestic work to be labour, and therefore, by definition, to be production. He made a number of passing references in Capital Volume One and Theories of Surplus Value which demonstrate this, for example:

> "Domestic work, such as sewing and mending, must be replaced by the purchase of ready made articles. Hence the diminished expenditure of labour in the home is accompanied by an increased expenditure of money outside." (Marx 1976 p.518).

> "The largest part of society, that is to say, the working class, must incidentally perform this kind of labour for itself; but it is only able to perform it when it has laboured 'productively'. It can only cook meat for itself when it has produced a wage with which to pay for the meat; and it can only keep its furniture and dwellings clean, it can only polish its boots, when it has produced the value of the furniture, house, rent and boots..." (Marx 1969 p.166).

The analysis in the Chapter Two attempts to concretise Marx's 'schema' of the reproduction of the commodity labour-power in a manner consistent with the method of abstraction and concretisation employed in Capital. Although most of the issues raised in the Debate are encompassed within it, the analysis does not take the Debate, or positions advanced therein, as its point of departure. I do not consider any of the existing economic analyses to be correct. The main arguments advanced in support of the various 'positions' in the Debate are subject to a critique in Chapter Four.

Chapter Three deals with the historical origin of domestic labour. The discussion is theoretically general rather than historically detailed. From the analysis in Chapter Two it follows that domestic labour is a historically specific form of production which has its origin in the transformation of direct subsistence production during the transition from the feudal to the capitalist mode of of production. This view is discussed and contrasted with the widely held opinion that women's household labour constitutes a distinct type of production which has persisted through the ages. Of importance in this connection, and indeed throughout the thesis, is the distinction between household labour as an aggregation, or combination, of concrete, useful labour tasks and household labour as a specific type of production as defined by the social relations within which it takes place. Of primary importance throughout is the analysis of the production relations which really define and delineate domestic labour from other forms of production.

Part Two consists of Chapters Five, Six and Seven, the three historical studies. These are introduced at the beginning of Part Two.

CHAPTER ONE

CONSIDERATIONS ON CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLIGICAL PRINCIPLES

I began my investigations with the notion that the term 'women's domestic labour' defined the subject of my thesis, and that a thoroughgoing study of women's household labour would lay the basis for later work on the specific oppression of women in capitalist society. I remain firmly committed to the view that women's socially ascribed responsibility for household labour is centrally related to their oppression. However, I soon discovered that in order to arrive at a theoretical understanding of women's domestic labour and its relationship to female oppression, one had initially to make a conceptual abstraction from the sexual division of labour; one had first to establish the nature of domestic labour as a form of production in a manner which avoided treating gender as a quality of that labour.

This method of approach is fundamentally at odds with that lodged in the existing body of Feminist and Marxist Feminist literature in which the relationship between domestic labour and patriarchy is dealt with theoretically. Adopting such a method was, in fact, part of a wholesale rejection of the premises and conclusions accepted by those Feminist theorists whose particular concern has been to give patriarchy a material foundation

in domestic production relations. This variant of Feminist theory is referred to throughout this thesis as 'Materialist Feminism',(1) and its method of approach to domestic labour is examined in the first part of this chapter. This examination is organised around a discussion about how two of its proponents have, or would, answer the question which I took as the starting point of my investigations: why does women's domestic labour exist? The importance of this question lies, of course, in the predictive powers of its answer. It was the inadequacy of Materialist Feminism's answer which reaffirmed my view that Marxism provided the correct methodoligical, conceptual and theoretical guide in the study of domestic labour.

1. Domestic Labour: the Materialist Feminist Approach

The methodology characteristic of the Materialist Feminist approach to women's domestic labour is clearly demonstrated in the work of Christine Delphy (1980(a)) and Heidi Hartmann (1976, 1979, 1981). It involves the conceptual fusion, or conflation, of the gender characteristics of the performer of labour with the form of labour itself.(2) Thus domestic labour is gendered from the outset; the fact that it is performed by women becomes an integral quality of the labour. This important premise leads to explanations of the past and present existence of domestic labour which are in fact derived

from the analysis of power relations between the sexes. Gender becomes a force determining the historical existence of forms of production. Thus for Delphy, domestic labour exists because it is female labour serving the interests of men; the maintenance of the 'family mode of production' enables husbands to exploit their wives through the appropriation of the latter's unpaid household labour. According to this view, despite the fact that virtually all the housewife's services could be bought on the market (and hence, according to Delphy, could theoretically be abolished), domestic labour persists because it is "...unpaid and because this labour is provided entirely by women" (Delphy 1980 p.10).(3) Similarly, in Hartmann's view, domestic labour exists largely because it is the mechanism through which patriarchy is preserved:(4)

> "Patriarchy's material base is men's control of women's labour; both in the household and in the labour market, the division of labour by gender tends to benefit men." (Hartmann 1981 p.372).

Thus both Delphy's and Hartmann's analyses lead to an essentially idealist and functionalist equation of the reasons for the material existence of domestic labour with the 'functions' or 'benefits' it serves or secures for men. This seems to me to be fundamentally incorrect. Even if it could be shown that men exploit women through domestic labour this could no more be an explanation for the historical existence of domestic labour than could the

exploitation of the wage worker by the capitalist provide the explanation for the historical existence of generalised commodity production.

Too frequently in Materialist Feminist theory patriarchal production relations turn out to be material constructs somehow determined, or brought into existence, by the collective consciousness, or will, of men. Material reality becomes the product of the idea; idealism triumphs over materialism. In contrast, a really materialist understanding of production relations, including domestic production relations, requires a non-idealist premise:

> "In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, <u>which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production</u>." (Marx 1977 p.20: my emphasis).

Thus I arrived at a methodology fundamentally opposed to that of Materialist Feminism. It involved breaking the initial question down into two separate ones, each requiring an independent analysis. The first question became simply: why does domestic labour exist? The second is: why is it that most domestic labour is performed by women? The answer to the second question does not, and cannot, provide the answer to the first, and vice versa, but <u>both</u> answers are necessary for a full understanding of the relationship between women's oppression and household labour. Explaining the past and present existence of domestic labour entails applying the conceptual tools

associated with Marxist historical materialism and political economy, in abstraction from considerations of gender; it involves using these conceptual tools to establish the nature of household production relations and their place in the historical development of human productive activity. The second question demands an investigation into the sexual division of labour - its material roots in human society generally, and the specific historical form of development of the sexual division of labour in the capitalist epoch. Further, I would argue that the materialist method embodied in the Marxist theoretical framework is as adequate to this second line of investigation as it is to the first; I do not adhere to the view that the former question requires Marxism while the latter requires some other theoretical system such as Feminism. This is not to say, of course, that Marxists have adequately addressed the question of gender relations, merely that Marxism supplies the methodological and conceptual tools for so doing.

It is important to note that my dichotomous method of approach to theorising women's domestic labour does not rule out in advance the possibility that household production relations are exploitative, and that insofar as men and women occupy different places within these relations, that one sex exploits the other. It is the case, however, that were such a conclusion reached it would not embody within it the teleological notion that such an arrangement existed <u>because</u> it was to the

advantage of the exploiting sex.

Having arrived at the position that the theoretical analysis of the nature and existence of domestic labour, and that of the sexual division of labour under capitalism, should proceed from independent starting points, limited space demanded that a choice be made between the two. I chose the former for two main reasons: first, because in the order of theoretical problem solving it seemed to be the logical first step towards the goal of understanding the relationship between domestic labour and women's oppression, to be followed elsewhere by, and subsequently related to, an analysis of the sexual division of labour. The second reason is that I was keen to tackle, in some detail, the confusions and problems thrown up in the Domestic Labour Debate. This necessitated a focus on the political economy of household labour, including issues relating to the historical origins and development of domestic labour under capitalism. Thus both the theoretical and historical chapters in this thesis are either exclusively or predominantly concerned with the analysis of domestic labour as a form of production per se. However, in the more empirically based accounts of the historical development in household labour in 19th and 20th century Britain in Part Two, the reality of the sexual division of labour ensures that the factual history is largely one of women's household labour.

2. Domestic Labour: the 'Debate's' Approach

Having discussed the idealist and functionalist conceptions informing the Materialist Feminist approach to domestic labour, it is now necessary to turn a critical eye upon the Domestic Labour Debate.(5)

Without at this point going into the politico-economic substance of the various analyses advanced in the Debate, one can unfortunately identify in most of its contributors' overall approach to domestic labour similar conceptual and methodological failings of an idealist and functionalist character. These have led to incorrect analyses of the nature of household production under capitalism. If the Materialist Feminists explain the existence of domestic labour in terms of its functionality for men, the Marxists and Marxist Feminists in the Debate explain it in terms of its functionality for 'capital', 'capitalism' or 'the capitalist class'. It is not necessary to quote extensively from the Debate to illustrate this; it is a weakness that has been highlighted by critics of this essentially Marxist discourse, as well as by some of its sympathisers. For example, Bruce Curtis has noted the following:

> "The tendency on the part of many contributors to the domestic labour debate to seek the basis of the existence of domestic labour in its functions and consequences [for capital] is frequently projected onto the history of domestic labour as well... This state of affairs is commonly seen to be an outcome caused by capital." (Curtis 1980 pp.120-121).

Maxine Molyneux, a critic of the debate, argues in her article Beyond the Domestic Labour Debate (1979):(6)

> "The debate on domestic labour and the family has been suffused with what can best be described as functionalist assumptions. Housework is, for instance, variously referred to as 'crucial', 'necessary' or 'essential' to capitalism; for its part capitalism is sometimes seen as having 'created' housework, and in some formulations even 'depends' on it for survival." (Molyneux 1979 p.20).

Jane Humphries also criticises the Debate for its functionalism. Objecting to arguments that the persistance of the working class family can be explained by capitalism's dependence upon the domestic labour performed within it, she states the following:

> "The survival of the working class family is not adequately explained by capitalism's dependence upon it. This argument depends on a crude reductionalist approach and a mechanical functionalist interpretation." (Humphries 1977(b) p.27).

Although critics like Humphries and Molyneux have highlighted some important weaknesses in the Domestic Labour literature, too often the baby is thrown out with the bath water and the study of domestic labour is rejected (or deprioritised) along with the Debate. Against this, I would argue that the study of domestic labour remains vital; it cannot be dismissed as either fruitless or exhausted by reference to the Domestic Labour Debate.(7) What is required, however, is a different approach - an approach which suffers neither from functionalism nor idealism.

Conceptual and methodological approaches to domestic labour do not, of course, exist in a theoretical vacuum; they are manifestations of ways of understanding social life and social development associated with different theoretical and philosophical social scientific systems. In my own attempt to develop an alternative approach I have drawn upon the Marxian historical materialist world view. The success or otherwise of my attempt to develop a historical materialist analysis can be judged by its results in the following chapters. However, in the final section of this chapter it remains to make some further introductory remarks.

3. For a Historical Materialist Approach to Domestic Labour

What then constitutes an alternative approach in answering the question, why does domestic labour exist under capitalism? The alternative is to apply to the household form of production the guiding principles of the established historical materialist approach to forms of production in general; to state once again the starting point:

> "In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production." (Marx 1977 p.20).

By applying this conception to domestic labour one can immediately formulate several propositions which can be summarised as follows:

i) The existence of domestic labour must be determined on the one hand by a particular level of development of the productive forces, and on the other hand by the nature of other forms of production, similarly determined by the productive forces, with which domestic labour co-exists.

ii) Like other forms of production, domestic labour must come into existence as a result of change in the economic foundation of society, change which has as its motor an objective force - the growing contradiction between the material forces and relations of production:

> "At a certain stage of development the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or - this merely expresses the same thing in legal terms - with the property relations within the framework of which they have hitherto operated." (Marx 1977 p.21).

iii) Like specifically capitalist, feudal, or any other production relations, domestic production relations must develop historically because they represent a system of production adequate to the further development of the material forces of production, and in this sense, domestic labour must be an objective necessity at a certain stage of social development. Accordingly, at a subsequent stage of development, domestic labour as a form of production

must come into contradiction with the further development of the material productive forces.

Here, the existence of domestic labour is not conceived of in terms of its functionality for capitalism, nor in terms of 'interests served' by its existence for particular social groups. Rather its existence is posited to be the result of the objective transformation and development of forms and systems of production resulting from the sharpening contradictions between material productive forces and social relations of production. The difficulty of course, lies in translating these general propositions into a developed and concrete analysis. Crucially this involves first of all identifying what form of production domestic labour is, and on the basis of this, looking for its historical origins in past transformations in the economic foundation of society.(8) Thus it is the political economy of domestic labour that is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF DOMESTIC LABOUR

In any exposition of a new theoretical analysis, the method of presentation is of crucial importance. The method of presentation in this chapter requires particular introduction to assist the reader in comprehending the theoretical construct as it unfolds.

As Marx pointed out in his Postface to the Second Edition of Capital Volume One, the methods of inquiry and presentation in the field of political economy are quite distinct:

> "Of course the method of presentation must differ in form from that of inquiry. The latter has to appropriate the material in detail, to analyse its different forms of development and to track down their inner connection. Only after this work has been done can the real movement be appropriately presented." (Marx 1976 p.102).

For reasons outlined in the previous chapter my method of inquiry did not follow the well-trodden path of deriving the analysis of domestic labour from an identification of how capital, the capitalist class, or men, benefited, or were served by (women's) household labour. Thus I did not start out from an examination of the relationship between domestic labour and capital, nor from the sexual division of labour associated with its performance. My starting point was entirely different and, I believe, free of any a priori assumptions. It was the examination of how the

labour-power of a class dependent upon wage-labour is reproduced. To put it another way, the starting point was the reproduction of the special commodity labour-power under conditions of generalised commodity production. The relationship between domestic labour and the production and reproduction of capital - that is, the production of surplus-value - is a subject for consideration only at a much later stage in the investigation.

My method of presentation of the results of this investigation can be succinctly stated as being the step by step concretisation of Marx's analysis of the reproduction of the working class in Capital. In the first section I discuss why there is no analysis of domestic labour in Capital. The explanation advanced is essentially a methodological one which leads on to a discussion in section two about the need, and the manner in which, to concretise Marx's 'pure form' conception so that household labour finds its place in the political economy of bourgeois society. In section three there is an examination of exactly how Marx theorised the reproduction of the working class in Capital, that is, how he treated the reproduction of labour-power at a level of abstraction which precisely excluded domestic labour. I term Marx's theorisation his 'schema of the reproduction of the working class'. The discussion of this schema in turn leads to an examination of four pivotal concepts: the means of subsistence, the means of production, individual consumption and productive consumption.

Having discussed Marx's schema of the

reproduction of the working class, I proceed in section four with the concretisation of this schema by introducing a fact of concrete reality: the working class reproduces itself, in part, through the performance of domestic labour in the home.(1) There follows a discussion of the domestic labour process in which the concepts means of production, means of subsistence, individual consumption, and productive consumption, are applied as analytical tools. Here it is established that household production constitutes a labour process in which means of subsistence necessary for the reproduction of labour-power are produced via the utilisation of the domestic means of production.(2)

In section five the discussion focuses on the peculiarities of the commodity labour-power and its production. This in turn leads to the posing of the essential theoretical question in section six: is domestic labour a form of subsistence production or a form of commodity production? It is this question which is at the heart of the Domestic Labour Debate. The subsequent sections in the chapter deal with the consequences for value theory of my own answer to the question, namely that domestic labour is a form of simple commodity production which at the same time involves the production of use-values for direct subsistence. The most important section in the latter part of the chapter is that dealing with domestic labour and the transfer of value.

1. The Abstraction From Domestic Labour in Marx's 'Capital'

By definition, production under capitalism is dominated by the specifically capitalist form of commodity production,

> "In all forms of society there is one specific kind of production which predominates over the rest, whose relations thus assign rank and influence to the others. It is a general illumination which bathes all the other colours and modifies their particularity. It is a particular ether which determines the specific gravity of every being which has materialized within it." (Marx 1973 pp.106-107).

Household labour is one of the 'other' forms of production in existence under capitalism from which Marx abstracts in his study of the predominant form in Capital. Why was this kind of abstraction necessary? Preobrazhensky gave one of the best accounts of Marx's method of political economy in The New Economics (1965). On the basis of Marx's statements on method, and his own study of Capital, Preobrazhensky describes the profound use of the method of analytical abstraction necessary to uncover the laws of the capitalist form of commodity production. Marx informed us in the Preface to the First Edition of Capital Volume One:

> "Moreover, in the analysis of economic forms neither microscopes nor chemical reagents are of assistance. The power of abstraction must replace both." (Marx 1976 p.90).

The power of conceptual abstraction is applied at

different levels in Capital; the economic is separated out from the complexity of economic, political and other social relations; within the sphere of the economic, Marx abstracts from the "chaotic conception of the whole" (1973 p.100), towards:

> "...ever more simple concepts, from the imagined concrete towards ever thinner abstractions, until I had arrived at the simplest determinants. From there the journey would have to be retraced until I had finally arrived at the [whole]... again, but this time not as the chaotic conception of the whole, but as a rich totality of many determinations and relations." (Marx 1973 p.100).

Another crucial aspect of Marx's abstraction is that it is capitalist commodity production in its pure form that is the subject of investigation; Preobrazhensky put it thus:

> "In order to grasp the basic dialectical law of development of capitalist economy in its equilibrium generally, it is necessary, first, to rise above all those phenomena of concrete capitalism which prevent us from understanding this social order and its development in its purest form. Marx writes on this matter: 'In theory it is assumed that the laws of capitalist production operate in their pure form. In reality there exists only approximation; but this approximation is the greater, the more developed the capitalist mode of production and the less it is adulterated and amalgamated with the survivals of former economic conditions'. Consequently, in order to understand the laws of capitalism it is necessary to build up a concept of pure capitalism, as Marx does in 'Capital'." (Preobrazhensky 1965 pp.45-46).

Therefore, in Capital, all "...disturbing subsidiary circumstances" (Marx 1976 p.727) are abstracted from;(3) it is assumed that only two classes exist - the capitalist and working classes, and that the whole world economy has

been embraced by the capitalist mode of production.(4) It is 'classical capitalism' in the shape of 19th century English society which Marx takes as his model, that is, a capitalist economy in its progressive stage of development and growth.(5)

In abstracting from household labour (and other forms of non-capitalist production) for theoretical and methodological reasons, Marx was nevertheless making an abstraction which at the time of writing appeared to be in accordance with the direction of historical development. From the comments that he did make about the domestic work of the British working class (peripheral comments largely confined to a few footnotes, and quotations from factory inspectors and other social commentators in those sections in Capital where the theoretical analysis is illustrated and given substance with descriptions of the conditions of working class life in connection with long hours of wage work, the effects of the implementation of the Factory Acts, and so forth), it is clear that in the context of early to mid-19th century capitalism the 'domestic life' of the industrial working class family was in the process of dissolution: "...but from this we see how capital, for the purposes of its self-valorisation, has usurped the family labour necessary for consumption" (Marx 1976 p.518), and, "...large-scale industry, in overturning the economic foundation of the old family system, and the family labour corresponding to it, has also dissolved the old family relationships" (Marx 1976 p.620). It is this which constitutes the historical basis for the theoretical

abstraction from household labour in Capital.

2. The Concretisation of Marx's Political Economy

Marx spent over thirty years fathoming the laws of capitalist commodity production and his work was never completed, a fact which many Feminists overlook when they criticise Marx for 'ignoring' women's domestic labour (Hartmann 1979, Bradby 1982). Nevertheless, he left us with a highly developed (if incomplete) political economy of capitalist production at a level of abstraction which excluded the consideration of household labour. In order to develop an analysis of this labour it is necessary to concretise Marx's study, that is, to move in a manner consistent with his method, from the higher to a lower level of abstraction, to a level that encompasses domestic labour as part of the whole. Herein, of course, resides the whole difficulty. The task is to move from the abstract schema of the reproduction of the working class (on a day-to-day, and generaltional basis) presented in Capital to a level of analysis approximating more closely with reality in which the household labour process is an integral part. The analysis presented in this thesis represents an attempt at a theoretical concretisation consistent with Marx's method and categories of political economy. The process of concretisation must proceed from Marx's bedrock analysis of specifically capitalist production relations, must flow consistently from it, and thus represent a true concretisation and not a negation of

it; it should not involve the revision of the laws of motion discovered by Marx, nor the violation of the specific scientific content he gave to the categories at the heart of the system: value, surplus-value, individual consumption, productive consumption, productive and unproductive labour, and so forth. But at the same time, in order to concretise, one must know which abstractions and assumptions associated with the 'pure form' theoretical conception must be relaxed, and in what direction. The relaxation of assumptions in the direction of concrete reality necessarily poses new problems, brings about changed and sometimes opposite conditions and relations, and immediately has implications which <u>at first sight</u> may seem to bring into question the validity of Marx's political economy in general, or aspects of it. The danger here is to recoil from these problems and implications and simply attempt to fit household labour into the framework Marx provided us with in <u>Capital</u>. However, one cannot simply insert domestic labour into Marx's schema of the reproduction of the working class; by definition it does not slot into a schema which operates at a level of abstraction which precisely excludes it. Nor can one attempt to concretise on the one hand but also hang on to some conditions and assumptions belonging to Marx's pure conception and only valid at this higher level of abstraction simply because it appears to resolve some sticky problems. Such errors, either the revision of Marx's categories, or the holding on to assumptions and abstractions only valid in relation to the pure form

conception, are manifest in the Domestic Labour Debate.

3. Marx's Schema of the Reproduction of the Working Class

Having examined why Marx abstracted from domestic labour in Capital, and having stated that he was operating with a schema of the reproduction of the working class which excluded consideration of this labour, it is necessary to investigate this schema in more detail. Its essential elements are as follows. Consonant with the pure form theoretical conception, it is assumed that all material production takes place within specifically capitalist relations of production,(6) and further that:

> "The society's total product, and thus its total production process, breaks down into two great departments:
>
> I. Means of production: commodities that possess a form in which they either have to enter productive consumption, or at least can enter this
>
> II. Means of consumption: commodities that possess a form in which they enter the individual consumption of the capitalist and working classes" (Marx 1978 p.417).

It follows from the above that those commodities in Department II which constitute the consumption fund of the working class are necessarily conceived of as finished products, that is, as products which have been manufactured to the state of completion and require no additional applications of labour outside the capitalist labour process prior to their individual consumption. These means of consumption, or means of subsistence, are bought by the working class with wages received when the

only commodity it owns, labour-power, is sold. As finished means of subsistence, necessary "to produce the muscles, nerves, bones and brains of existing workers, and to bring new workers into existence" (Marx 1976 p.717), these are directly individually consumed. Between obtaining the means of subsistence in the market and their individual consumption, no additional labour is performed on the part of the working class for its own subsistence.

The concepts 'means of subsistence' and 'individual consumption' are therefore at the heart of Marx's schema. Along with their dialectical opposites, 'means of production' and 'productive consumption', these concepts are first examined in detail in that section of Capital Volume One which deals with the labour process in general, that is, "the labour process independently of any specific social formation" (Marx 1976 p.283), prior to the analysis of the valorization process.(7) Thus Marx first established the validity of these concepts for all forms of production whilst his main concern was their specific application to the capitalist production process. To begin here also with the labour process in general, one can state that the interlinked concepts, means of subsistence and individual consumption, belong to the domain of consumption, while the other two, means of production and productive consumption, belong to the domain of production, that is, relate to 'labour in process'.

Productive consumption is the consumption of means of production (the instruments and objects of labour) on the one hand, and the using up of living

labour-power (of human life forces: brains, muscles, nerves etc.) on the other, in the labour process itself. Individual consumption involves the using up of a labour product (or labour service) as a "direct object and servant of individual need" (Marx 1973 p.89), as a means of directly satisfying individual need:

> "Labour uses up its material factors, its subject and its instruments, consumes them, and is therefore a process of consumption. Such productive consumption is distinguished from individual consumption by this, that the latter uses up products, as means of subsistence for the living individual; the former as means whereby alone, labour, the labour-power of the living individual, is enabled to act. The product, therefore, of individual consumption, is the consumer himself; the result of productive consumption, is a product distinct from the consumer." (Marx 1974 p.179).

Therefore, from the point of view of production in general, under all social relations, those products which leave the labour process as finished articles and enter into individual consumption, are scientifically distinguished as means of subsistence. The opposite character of means of subsistence and means of production derives from their mutually exclusive destinies as products of labour: either they re-enter the labour process and are productively consumed, or they leave the sphere of production and are individually consumed. For example, Marx traces raw materials through the production process thus:

> "Although itself already a product, this raw material may have to go through a whole series of different processes, and in each of these it serves as raw material, changing its shape constantly, until it is

> precipitated from the last process of the series in finished form, either as means of subsistence or as instrument of labour." (Marx 1976 p.289: my emphasis).

and again:

> "Bathed in the fire of labour, appropriated as part of its organism, and infused with vital energy for the performance of the functions appropriate to their concept and to their vocation in the process, they are indeed consumed, but to some purpose, as elements in the formation of new use-values, new products, which are capable of entering into individual consumption as means of subsistence or into a new labour process as means of production." (Marx 1976 pp.289-290: my emphasis).

The concepts productive consumption, individual consumption, means of production, and means of subsistence, clearly had very specific meanings for Marx which were developed in relation to the labour process in general. It is only when one has grasped the analytic content of these concepts at this general level that one can really understand their significance for any particular form of social production, but also, the relevance of their usage in Marx's schema of the reproduction of the working class in capitalist society. Their general significance allows one to recognise that the household form of production involves the expenditure of living labour-power and the productive consumption of means of production (instruments and objects of labour) in the production of finished products - means of subsistence - which are then individually consumed. However, in abstracting from domestic labour, Marx in fact replaces this labour process, this production, in reality so central to the reproduction of the working class, with its opposite, that is, individual consumption pure and simple.

Thus in his schema of the reproduction of the working class, only the capitalist labour process exists; means of production are productively consumed within it and part of the total social product leaves this sphere of production in the form of means of subsistence - finished products - which are bought with wages and, without the performance of additional labour, enter directly into individual consumption. The following important passages from Capital Volume One illustrate this schema:

> "The worker's consumption is of two kinds. While producing he consumes the means of production with his labour, and converts them into products with a higher value than that of the capital advanced. This is his productive consumption. It is at the same time consumption of the labour-power by the capitalist who has bought it. On the other hand, the worker uses the money paid to him for his labour-power to buy the means of subsistence; this is his individual consumption. The worker's productive consumption and his individual consumption are therefore totally distinct. In the former, he acts as the motive power of capital, and belongs to the capitalist. In the latter, he belongs to himself, and performs his necessary vital functions outside the production process. The result of the first kind of consumption is that the capitalist continues to live, of the second, that the worker himself continues to live." (Marx 1976 p.717).

> "The capital given in return for labour-power is converted into means of subsistence which have to be consumed to reproduce the muscles, nerves, bones and brains of existing workers, and to bring new workers into existence. Within the limits of what is absolutely necessary, therefore, the individual consumption of the working class is the reconversion of the means of subsistence given by capital in return for labour-power into fresh labour-power which capital is again able to exploit. It is the production and reproduction of the capitalist's most indispensable means of production: the worker. The individual consumption of the worker, whether it occurs inside or outside the labour-process, remains an aspect of the production and reproduction of capital, just as the cleaning of machinery does, whether it is done during the labour process or when intervals in that process permit. The fact that the

> worker performs acts of individual consumption in his own interest, and not to please the capitalist, is something entirely irrelevant to the matter. The consumption of food by a beast of burden does not become any less a necessary aspect of the production process because the beast enjoys what it eats. The maintenance and reproduction of the working class remains a necessary condition for the reproduction of capital. But the capitalist may safely leave this to the worker's drives for self-preservation and propagation. All the capitalist cares for is to reduce the worker's individual consumption to the necessary minimum." (Marx 1976 pp.717-718).

Once this schema is understood, one can proceed with the concretisation of the analysis of the reproduction of the working class.

4. The Domestic Labour Process

In contrast to Marx's schema, commodities which leave the capitalist labour process destined for working class consumption are not necessarily, or in fact usually, 'finished' products which can be directly individually consumed. Some wage goods can be directly consumed, for example: a meal in a restaurant, some food products, items of furniture and other articles which constitute necessary means of subsistence in advanced capitalist societies such as cars, televisions and so forth. However, many commodities purchased with wages are 'unfinished' products "...manufactured up to a certain level" (Marx 1976 p.289), which require a further application of labour or 'finishing off' in a new labour process prior to consumption; they enter into the domestic labour process as objects of labour. Most food products fall into this category, but so do commodities requiring a considerable

transformation in the domestic labour process, for example fabrics purchased for making clothes and soft furnishings. Other wage goods, while apparently 'finished', are consumed gradually over time requiring repeated applications of labour at various intervals as a precondition for their continued individual consumption: clothes, bedding and furnishings need washing, ironing and mending; houses require cleaning, decorating and repair.

Increasingly under capitalism, commodities have been bought with wages which are not themselves individually consumed, either directly or indirectly; these are the tools, appliances and other instruments of labour, as well as a variety of auxiliary materials, which constitute part of the means of production necessary for household labour: chemical cleaning agents, laundry solutions, buckets and brooms, as well as cookers, washing machines, vacuum cleaners, sewing machines, irons, kettles and other 'domestic appliances'. Means of subsistence may be almost entirely produced within in the domestic sphere, for example, gardening equipment and materials may be bought with part of the wage to grow food in gardens or allotments giving the appearance of a certain self-sufficiency.

Finally, labour is also expended in household production for the purpose of providing services indispensible to the maintenance and reproduction of the working class family, services such as shopping, transportation, nursing and aspects of childcare.(8)

In this brief examination of the domestic labour

process I have applied those technical terms used by Marx in his discussion of the labour process in general:

> "The simple elements of the labour process are 1) purposeful activity, that is work itself, 2) the object on which that work is performed, and 3) the instruments of that work." (Marx 1976 p.284).

Together, the latter two elements comprise the means of production:

> "If we look at the whole process from the point of view of its result, the products, it is plain that both the instruments and the object of labour are means of production." (Marx 1976 p.287).

This technical dissection of the household production process is pursued in more detail in Chapter Six. The important point to note here is that commodities bought with wages are not generally directly consumable; when one takes domestic labour into account in one's analysis of the reproduction of the working class, it becomes clear that in reality it is the products of household production which are the 'finished', directly consumable material and immaterial means of subsistence. The majority of commodities purchased with wages enter the domestic labour process as objects and instruments of labour - as means of production which are productively consumed in the production of finished means of subsistence for individual consumption.(9) Another way of putting it is that the means of subsistence which are individually consumed by the working class family have objectified in them a combination of both capitalist and domestic labour. In

fact very few means of subsistence are the product of either capitalist or domestic labour alone. For example, the different types of labour objectified in a cooked meal can be identified as follows: capitalist labour is expended in the production of the raw materials - the packaged raw meat, vegetables, tinned or frozen produce; capitalist labour is objectified in those instruments of labour productively consumed in the domestic labour process - in the electric or gas cooker, kitchen tools, pots,pans and so forth; domestic labour is expended in the performance of various labour tasks - shopping, food preparation, cooking and serving.(10)

5. Means of Subsistence and the Commodity Labour-power

In defining the social relations of household production, one could say that as a form of unpaid labour performed by the working class which produces finished means of subsistence for its individual consumption, household labour represents a form of direct subsistence production. However, for Marx, the reproduction of the working class in Capital is nothing other than the reproduction of labour-power, and under capitalism labour-power itself takes the form of a commodity. In his schema, the individual consumption of the working class is the production and the reproduction of the commodity labour-power. If, after concretisation, we can see that domestic labour is also objectified in the means of subsistence necessary for individual consumption, one should logically

conclude that it is also labour necessary for the reproduction of the commodity labour-power. From the point of view of the final product, the commodity labour-power, domestic labour appears to be a form of commodity production. Is household production direct subsistence or commodity production? This question is at the centre of the Domestic Labour Debate and demands serious analysis. First, however, let's examine the commodity labour-power more closely.

In capitalist society labour-power takes the form of a commodity; as the capacity to labour, this commodity is of course inseparable from the body of the individual person. Deprived of the means of production with which to produce the <u>entirety</u> of their means of subsistence, the working class must repeatedly sell its labour-power, the only commodity it owns, in order to obtain the necessities of life. Further:

> "In order that its possessor may sell it as a commodity, he must have it at his disposal, he must be the free proprietor of his own labour capacity, hence of his person... He must constantly treat his labour-power as his own property, his own commodity." (Marx 1967 p.271).

Like all other commodities, labour-power is itself a product of labour, but in exactly what sense? Because the capacity to labour is inseparable from the form of the living individual, the production of the commodity labour-power is nothing other than the reproduction of the individual worker and of the class dependent on wage labour, that is, the daily maintenance of the working

class and the replacement of one generation of workers with another. In Marx's schema of the reproduction of the working class, the production and reproduction of labour-power is not achieved directly in the capitalist production process. Labour-power does not roll off the production line like tins of beans or packets of soup. Many different kinds of use-values are produced in the capitalist labour process (material and immaterial) but no capitalist directly produces the commodity labour-power. If this were the case the worker would not be the "...free proprietor of his labour capacity" (Marx 1976 p.271), but a slave, for labour power would become the saleable property of the capitalist.

Rather, it is a unique feature of the commodity labour-power that its production is mediated by the individual consumption of other products of labour, of the means of subsistence, "...the individual consumption of the working class if the reconversion of the means of subsistence given by capital in return for labour-power into fresh labour-power" (Marx 1976 pp.717-718). It is the means of subsistence that are the direct products of labour; labour has been expended in their production and definite amounts of labour are objectified, or embodied, in them. Through the 'destruction' or using up of these products in the process of individual consumption, life forces - nerves, brains, bones and muscles - are renewed, and hence the capacity to labour is reproduced. Thus the labour first objectified in the form of means of subsistence, is now objectivied in the human person

through individual consumption; the labour necessary to produce the means of subsistence is also the labour necessary to produce the commodity labour-power. Thus labour-power is a product of labour not because it is the immediate product of the capitalist labour process, but because other products of labour, means of subsistence, are individually consumed, and as the reproduction of life itself, "...the capitalist may safely leave this up to the worker's drives for self-preservation and propagation" (Marx 1976 p.718). Again, the important point is that whereas in Marx's schema of the reproduction of the commodity labour-power only capitalist labour exists and is therefore objectified in the means of subsistence, and hence in labour-power, a concrete analysis which takes household labour into account must conclude that both capitalist and domestic labour are objectified in the means of subsistence, and hence in the commodity labour-power.

6. Subsistence Production or Commodity Production?

We have seen that from the point of view of its immediate products, household production appears to be the production of use-values for subsistence, for immediate use, whereas from the point of view of the final product, the commodity labour-power, it appears to be a form of simple commodity production, and hence production for exchange. In short, domestic labour seems to be both production for direct use and production for exchange, an

apparent contradiction which requires further examination.

The commodity form of labour-power is a historical product:

> "One thing, however, is clear: nature does not produce on the one hand owners of money or commodities, and on the other hand men possessing nothing but their own labour-power. This relation has no basis in natural history, nor does it have a social basis common to all periods of human history. It is clearly the result of past historical development, the product of many economic revolutions, of the extinction of a whole series of older formations of social production." (Marx 1976 p.273).

Capitalist production presupposed the transformation of individual private property into capitalist private property; this required the separation of the producers from their unity with, that is, their ownership of, the means of production which rendered them independent. Only when the labour-power of 'free workers' was available in the commodity market could the specifically capitalist form of commodity production and the appropriation of the surplus product in the form of surplus-value commence. The historical process whereby the producers were forcibly separated from their means of production was described by Marx as the pre-history of capital, the process of 'primitive accumulation'. In the following chapter I discuss this process in connection with the historical origin of domestic labour.

In the period of transition from feudalism to capitalism, individual private property in the means of production was the characteristic property relation; it attained its "...classical form" (Marx 1976 p.927) as

feudal relations decayed, only to be destroyed in turn by developing capital - wage labour relations. In this transitional period, the commodity form of labour-power was the exception, not the rule. On the basis of these pre-capitalist property relations, there existed both direct subsistence production and production for exchange (simple commodity production); commodity production may have involved simply the selling of the surplus product, or the production of articles specifically for exchange: yarn, cloth, butter, beer and so forth. Under these production relations the worker and the means of production "...remained closely united, like a snail within its shell" (Marx 1976 p.480). What is important here is that under these conditions, the product of labour is either exchanged, taking the form of a commodity, or it is used up by the independent producers as means of production, or as means of subsistence for individual consumption. Marx expressed this in relation to the historical appearance of the products of labour as commodities as opposed to the appearance of labour-power itself as a commodity:

> "Definite historical conditions are involved in the existence of the product as a commodity. In order to become a commodity, the product must cease to be produced as the immediate means of subsistence of the producer himself... The production and circulation of commodities can still take place even though the great mass of the objects produced are still intended for the immediate requirements of their producers, and are not turned into commodities, so that the process of social production is as yet by no means dominated in its length and bredth by exchange-value. The appearance of products as commodities requires a level of development of the division of labour within society such that the separation of use-value from

> exchange-value, a separation which first begins with barter, has already been completed. But such a degree of development is common to many economic formations of society, with the most diverse historical characteristics." (Marx 1976 p.273: my emphasis).

In short, under these conditions, production for immediate use is the antithesis of production for exchange.(11)

The appearance of labour-power itself as a commodity, a commodity which could be freely sold by it's owner in the market in return for a wage, announces, "...a new epoch in the process of social production" (Marx 1976 p.274). With the separation of the independent peasant producers and artisans from their means of production and the creation of a class dependent on wage labour as the means of obtaining life necessities, the production relations at the foundation of the independent producer's household economy were destroyed; both the traditional forms of direct subsistence production and simple commodity production were undermined.

In Marx's pure form theoretical conception, the transition from the household economy based upon individual private property to dependence upon wage labour is an analytically complete and thoroughgoing one in that the working class ceases to perform labour for direct subsistence within the family of any kind. But in reality, a new form of direct subsistence production, that is, domestic labour, does exist alongside wage labour, a form of subsistence production distinct from previous forms which presuppose means of production such as land, animals, looms and raw materials, in the hands of the producers; a form bound up with the utilization and

transformation of products of the capitalist labour process, bought with the wage, in the production of objects and services for individual consumption in the domestic labour process. Like previous forms of subsistence production, domestic labour produces use-values for immediate use, and through the individual consumption of these products, labour-power is reproduced. But unlike previous forms of subsistence production, domestic labour reproduces labour-power which has taken the form of a commodity. As we have seen, through the individual consumption of its labour products, domestic labour is objectified in the commodity labour-power itself. Thus from the point of view of the immediate products - cooked meals, clean clothes and so forth, domestic labour is a form of use-value production for individual consumption, that is, a form of direct subsistence production. But from the point of view of the final product of this labour, the commodity labour-power, domestic labour is a form of simple commodity production. Therefore domestic labour is both production for immediate use and production for exchange, something excluded under pre-capitalist production relations. The possibility of such a unity can only arise where labour-power itself, and not just the products of labour, becomes a commodity. When labour-power is a commodity, labour within the family for subsistence simultaneously takes on an objectively commodity producing character. Domestic labour is the only form of labour which embodies such a unity by the very nature of the historical conditions of it's existence.

This makes the household labour involved in the reproduction of the working class a quite distinctive form of social production. I shall reserve the term domestic labour for use only in relation to this particular type of production.(12)

It is becoming clear that because the production of the commodity labour-power is actually the reproduction of the living individual him/herself, important differences distinguish the conditions and features of the production of this special "...peculiar commodity" (Marx 1976 p.274), from those pertaining to commodities which are distinct from the living individual. These differences give rise in turn to forms of appearance which conceal or blur the real nature of labour-power as a commodity, and of domestic labour as a form of commodity producing labour. As we have seen, the commodity labour-power is not the immediate product of the capitalist labour process. It is the means of consumption, objects and services distinct from labour-power, that the capitalist produces, and it is the commodity form of these products which interests the capitalist, not their useful qualities:

> "Use-values are produced by capitalists only because and in so far as they form the material substratum of exchange-value, are the bearers of exchange-value." (Marx 1976 p.293).

Therefore, from the point of view of the production process in general, commodities distinct from labour-power are the aim, or 'ends' of production. It is otherwise in household production (and in fact in all forms of direct

subsistence production); here the explicit end purpose is the maintenance of life, the reproduction of the producers themselves, whether this is expressed consciously as the maintenance of the family or the individual. The immediate products of domestic labour, cooked meals, cleaned houses and so forth, are not the concluding aim or ends in themselves; they are merely the means to another end - the reproduction of people, and hence the reproduction of their labour-power.

The recognition that domestic labour represents a unity, or the fusion, of direct subsistence production and commodity production, is the key to solving some of the puzzles about the origins and historical development of household labour under capitalism, as I hope to demonstrate in the following chapters. The Domestic Labour Debate has floundered on a formalistic approach which insists that domestic labour is <u>either</u> use-value production <u>or</u> commodity production (see Chapter Four). However, it remains in this chapter to pursue one side of the matter in more detail, that is, the examination of domestic labour as a special form of simple commodity production. What, for example, are the consequences for value theory of identifying domestic labour as a form of commodity production, or more specifically, what does this mean for the value of labour-power? To answer this it is first necessary to have a clear understanding of the nature of value in Marx's political economy.

7. Value

The starting point of the theoretical presentation in Capital Volume One is the commodity, specifically: the single commodity, simple commodity production and exchange, and the simple form of value; "...the commodity form is the most general and the most undeveloped form of bourgeois production" (Marx 1976 p.176). In the first three chapters of Volume One, the minutiae of this "economic cell form" (Marx 1976 p.90) are examined in the context of an assumed society of independent, individual, commodity producers. It is important to clearly understand the distinctions between capitalist and simple commodity production; all too often in the Domestic Labour Debate, 'commodity production' is simply equated with the capitalist form of commodity production and consequently domestic labour is ruled out as a form of commodity producing labour from the start.(13)

Before discussing the value of the particular commodity labour-power, it is useful to review the key points about the value of commodities in general: the substance, magnitude, and form of appearance of value. Marx was the first to point out and analyse the "...twofold nature of the labour contained in commodities" (Marx 1976 p.132):

> "On the one hand, all labour is the expenditure of human labour-power, in the physiological sense, and it is in this quality of being equal, or abstract, human labour that it forms the value of commodities.

> On the other hand, all labour is an expenditure of human labour-power in a particular form and with a definite aim, and it is in this quality of being concrete useful labour that it produces use-values." (Marx 1976 p.137).

By conceptual abstraction, Marx isolates the substance of value. It is the amount of abstract human labour objectified, or congealed, in the commodity that constitutes its value; the source of value is labour in general, 'average social labour', or 'homogenous human labour', the expenditure "...of human brains, muscles, nerves, hands etc." (Marx 1976 p.134), "...without regard to the form of its expenditure" (Marx 1976 p.128). The substance of value can only be grasped conceptually if abstraction is made from the useful, concrete, characteristics of labour:

> "Equality in the full sense between different kinds of labour can be arrived at only if we abstract from their real inequality, if we reduce them to the characteristic they have in common, that of being the expenditure of human labour-power, of human labour in the abstract." (Marx 1976 p.166).

The quantity, or magnitude of value is determined by the,

> "...amount of the 'value forming substance', the labour, contained in the article. This quantity is measured by its duration, and the labour-time itself is measured on the particular scale of hours, days, etc." (Marx 1976 p.129).

This conceptual distinction between useful and abstract labour necessarily has a basis in the real manifestation of the dual character of labour. It is only in the actual exchange of commodities that the labour

contained within them takes on an objective character as human labour in the abstract, of labour in general. That is, only when different concrete, useful, labours confront each other through the exchange of their products can a real abstraction from the concrete characteristics of these labours occur and their reduction to an identical social substance, homogenous human labour, take place. The process that occurs in exchange is "...the reduction of all kinds of actual labour to their common character of being human labour in general" (Marx 1976 pp.159-160).

The objectivity of the product of labour as a value is thus an expression of a social relation:

> "...let us remember that commodities possess an objective character as values only in so far as they are all expressions of an identical social substance, human labour, that their objective character as values is therefore purely social. From this it follows self-evidently that it can only appear in the social relationship between commodity and commodity." (Marx 1976 pp. 138-139).

and, "...the objectivity of commodities as values is the purely 'social existence' of these things" (Marx 1976 p.159). The form of appearance of value is the exchange-value of the commodity, that is, its value is expressed in the form of another commodity. The simple form of value is the expression of the value of one commodity in the physical form of another. In Capital Volume One, Marx traces the historical development of exchange relations, and thus of the value form, from its simple to its fully developed form - the money form. The money commodity is that commodity whose exclusive social role is to act as

the equivalent form for all other commodities - it is the universal equivalent. Thus when a commodity is exchanged for money, the labour embodied in it confronts not a single concrete labour of a different type, but the direct expression of social labour in general.

It is important to grasp that by human labour in the abstract, Marx always meant the labour in general of a particular society of commodity producing labourers:

> "...the labour that forms the substance of value is equal human labour, the expenditure of identical human labour-power. The total labour-power of society, which is manifested in the values of the world of commodities, counts here as one homogenous mass of human labour-power, although composed of innumerable individual units of labour-power." (Marx 1976 p.129).

Values are indeed "...crystals of social substance", or "...congealed quantities of social labour" (Marx 1976 p.129), expended in commodity production in a given society.(14)

Turning now to the magnitude of value, at any point in time a certain amount of average social labour will be necessary for the production of a commodity under "...the conditions of production normal for a given society and with the average degree of skill and intensity of labour prevalent in that society" (Marx 1976 p.129). It is only socially necessary labour-time which determines the magnitude of value of a commodity. In exchange, the labour embodied in a commodity is reduced to average social labour, but it is not the actual labour-time spent in its production which determines the magnitude of its

value, but the labour-time socially required for its production; to express it another way: "The individual commodity counts only as an average sample of its kind" (Marx 1976 p.130). Marx examines the effects of an increase in the productivity of labour on the 'individual' and 'social' values of commodities in the following passage:

> "...the value of a commodity is determined not by the quantity of labour actually objectified in it, but by the quantity of living labour necessary to produce it. A commodity represents, say, six working hours. If an invention is made by which it can be produced in three hours, the value, even of the commodity already produced, falls by half. It now represents three hours of socially necessary labour instead of the six formerly required. It is therefore the quantity of labour required to produce it, not the objectified form of that labour, which determines the amount of the value of a commodity." (Marx 1976 pp.676-677).

This relationship between actual labour-time and socially necessary labour-time, individual values and social values, is crucial in the analysis of domestic labour and its relation to capitalist commodity producing labour, as I shall demonstrate.

8. The Value of the Commodity Labour-power

The definition of the value of labour-power in Capital accords with, belongs to, and flows logically from, Marx's abstract schema of the reproduction of labour-power. It is obvious that at the level of abstraction in Volume One, the value of this commodity is

determined by the value of the means of subsistence produced within capitalist relations of production and individually consumed by the working class, since the means of subsistence are produced in their entirety within the capitalist labour process. Marx says that the value of labour-power is determined, like any other commodity value, by the amount of average social labour objectified in it:

> "The value of labour-power is determined, as in the case of every other commodity, by the labour-time necessary for its production, and consequently also the reproduction, of this special article. In so far as it has value, it represents no more than a definite quantity of the average social labour objectified in it. Labour-power exists only as a capacity of the living individual. Its production consequently presupposes his existence. Given the existence of the individual, the production of labour-power consists in his reproduction of himself or his maintenance. For his maintenance he requires a certain quantity of the means of subsistence. Therefore the labour-time necessary for the production of labour-power is the same as that necessary for the production of those means of subsistence; in other words, the value of labour-power is the value of the means of subsistence necessary for the maintenance of its owner." (Marx 1976 p.274).

As we have seen, the means of subsistence are here conceived of as finished, purely capitalistically produced commodities. Thus the only labour objectified in the commodity labour-power via the individual consumption of the means of subsistence is capitalist labour. But not all social labour is expended in the capitalist labour process; a proportion of society's labour-power is expended in the domestic labour sphere of production. We have established that the commodity labour-power is the

product of both capitalist and domestic labour through the individual consumption of means of subsistence embodying labour expended in both of these spheres of production.

Therefore, one is faced with the following inescapable conclusion: if the value of the commodity labour-power is determined by the labour that has been expended in its production, then domestic labour, as well as capitalist labour, must enter as a determining element into this value. If domestic labour is a form of commodity producing labour, then it must also, by definition, be value producing labour. As with all commodity producing labour, it is only in the exchange of its product, that is, labour-power for the wage, that domestic labour is reduced to a definite quantity of average social labour - the substance of value. As a specific form of concrete useful labour (or the aggregate of concrete useful labours), domestic labour confronts other concrete labours through the exchange of labour-power for the wage. In this exchange, it is reduced to the characteristic it has in common with all other commodity producing labour - that of being the expenditure of human labour pure and simple, without regard to the form of its expenditure.

The magnitude of the value produced by domestic labour, and embodied in the commodity labour-power via the individual consumption of the means of subsistence, will be determined through its reduction to a definite quantity of average social labour. It will become clear later that since this involves the reduction of actual domestic labour-time to socially necessary labour-time, a great

disparity exists between the amount of domestic labour-time expended and the amount of value created by this labour.

To summarise: as part of the labour objectified in the commodity labour-power, domestic labour creates, in part, the value of this commodity. Whereas in Capital the value of labour-power is determined by the value of the means of subsistence embodying only capitalist labour, after concretisation, one must conclude that the value embodied in the commodity labour-power is produced by both capitalist and domestic labour.

Another important aspect of the value of labour-power is expressed in the following passages:

> "The value of labour-power [is] determined, not only by the labour-time necessary to maintain the individual adult worker, but also by that necessary to maintain his family." (Marx 1976 p.518).
>
> "The owner of labour-power is mortal. If then his appearance in the market is to be continuous, and the continuous transformation of money into capital assumes this, the seller of labour-power must perpetuate himself 'in the way every individual perpetuates himself, by procreation'. The labour-power withdrawn from the market by wear and tear, and by death, must be continually replaced by, at the very least, an equal amount of fresh labour-power. Hence, the sum of means of subsistence necessary for the production of labour-power must include the means necessary for the worker's replacement, i.e. his children, in order that this race of peculiar commodity-owners may perpetuate its presence on the market." (Marx 1976 p.275).

In his pure form conception of capitalism, Marx assumed two basic wage forms - the individual and the family wage forms. (15) The important point is that in the case of a family wage, the value represented in the adult male's

wage is not simply the equivalent of the value embodied in the means of subsistence necessary to reproduce his own labour-power, but of the value embodied in the subsistence products necessary to reproduce the labour-power of the whole family. Thus while only the adult male's labour-power may actually be sold, the value of this commodity is determined by the labour socially necessary to reproduce not just himself, but the whole family. This phenomenon, that the sale of labour-power may realise not simply the actual value embodied in the single individual labour-power, flows from the fact that this commodity exists in the physical form of the living individual. In order that labour-power can be sold during the 'working' years of life, it must be reproduced over an entire lifetime, that is, during periods when it is not sold (including intervals of unemployment), as well as during periods of employment. If wages are received only during periods when labour-power is actually sold, but as a precondition for this must be reproduced over a lifetime, a mechanism must exist for the distribution of means of subsistence amongst wage-workers and non-waged members of the working class. The family wage (or approximations to it) is the primary distribution mechanism, although its crudities and shortcomings necessitate the intervention of the state as an agency for the distribution and redistribution of means of subsistence between sections and individual members of the working class. Thus from the point of view of the working class considered as a single entity, in order to sell a portion of its labour-power each day to the

capitalist class, the entire working class has to be reproduced; the value of the portion of labour-power sold, which finds it's equivalence in the total daily working class wage, is therefore determined by the value embodied in the means of subsistence necessary to reproduce the whole class.

The relevance of all of this is that one has to treat the relationship between the value of the commodity labour-power and the value produced by domestic labour in the same way. That is, if one is discussing the family wage form rather than the individual wage, the value produced by domestic labour will not simply be represented by the actual domestic labour objectified in the adult male's own labour capacity. Rather, the value of the commodity labour-power will be determined, in part, by the value produced by domestic labour and objectified in the labour-power of the whole family, or the whole working class, via the individual consumption of the means of subsistence produced in the household labour process.

The other element involved in the determination of the value of labour-power which is relevant to this study is the 'historical and moral element':

> "...the number and extent of his so-called necessary requirements, as also the manner in which they are satisfied, are themselves products of history, and depend therefore to a great extent on the level of civilisation attained by a country; in particular they depend on the conditions in which, and consequently on the habits and expectations with which, the class of free workers has been formed. In contrast, therefore, with the case of other commodities, the determination of the value of labour-power contains a historical and moral element. Nevertheless, in a given country at a given period,

> the average amount of the means of subsistence necessary for the worker is a known datum." (Marx 1976 p.275).

The relevance of this will be discussed in the final section of this chapter.

To conclude, while in Marx's pure form theoretical conception, the value of labour-power is necessarily determined by the amount of average social labour embodied in means of subsistence produced within capitalist production relations, by concretising the analysis one arrives at the position that domestic labour, through its reduction to average social labour in the exchange relation, produces part of the value of the commodity labour-power, whether this value realises itself in the form of individual or family wages.(16)

9. Domestic Labour and the Transfer of Value

There is an important and interesting problem posed in the concretisation of Marx's pure form conception which has hardly been touched upon in the Domestic Labour Debate, the resolving of which, I believe, only confirms the view that domestic labour is commodity producing, and thus value creating labour.

We have seen how the reproduction of labour-power is posed in Marx's schema; the value embodied in the means of subsistence, capitalistically produced, is transferred to labour-power in the process of their individual consumption. But we also know from the concretised analysis so far, that the means of consumption

bought with wages do not enter directly into individual consumption but pass through the domestic labour process from which they emerge as finished consumable articles, or in which they are utilised in production, or in the performance of labour services. Thus from the point of view of the reproduction of the working class, the majority of means of consumption bought with the wage are actually means of production for the domestic labour process.

These means of production enter into the domestic labour process as the objects and instruments of labour. The problem is this: insofar as domestic means of production are not directly individually consumed but are instead utilized in the domestic labour process, how is it that their values can enter as determining elements into the value of labour-power? How do their values reappear as constituent elements of the value of the commodity labour-power, that is, how is this value transferred to labour-power?

The problem can be best illustrated by an example. An electric or gas cooker is undoubtedly an essential item for the daily reproduction of labour-power. But a cooker is not like clothing or food, it is not individually consumed. Its role in the reproduction of labour-power is as a means of production in the domestic labour process; it is an instrument of labour with which food can be cooked prior to consumption. If the value of labour-power is determined by the value embodied in consumption and subsistence goods necessary for its

reproduction, then the value of the cooker, like the value of vacuum cleaners, washing machines, and other instruments of labour, must enter as a determining element into the value of the commodity labour-power, but by some means other than direct individual consumption.

We know from Marx's analysis in Capital that value can be transferred in two ways. First, the value of means of subsistence can be transferred to the commodity labour-power in the process of individual consumption. The transfer of value in this way is unique to the commodity labour-power and flows from the peculiar nature and conditions of production of this special commodity, described earlier. Secondly, in the case of all other commodities, the value of the means of production used up in their creation, is preserved by being transferred to the product in the production process, by living labour itself, through productive consumption. In the labour process:

> "The worker adds fresh value to the material of his labour by expending on it a given amount of additional labour, no matter what the specific content, purpose and technical character of that labour may be. On the other hand, the values of the means of production used up in the process are preserved, and present themselves afresh as constituent parts of the value of the product; the values of the cotton and the spindle, for instance, reappear again in the value of the yarn. The value of the means of production is therefore preserved by being transferred to the product. This transfer takes place during the conversion of those means into a product, in other words during the labour process. It is mediated through labour." (Marx 1976 p.307).

In short, "Labour transmits to the product the value of the means of production consumed by it" (Marx 1976 p.754).

How then do the values of wage goods, which enter the domestic labour process as means of production, re-appear in the commodity labour-power? The answer to this puzzle obviously lies with domestic labour itself, with the domestic labour process. Domestic labour must have, as one of its properties, the capacity to preserve the values of the means of production it productively consumes. In fact, the values of these means of production pass through two opposite transfer processes before they reappear as component parts of the value of labour-power; first, they are transferred to, and preserved in, the immediate products of the domestic labour process (clean clothes, cooked meals and so on), through their productive consumption; secondly, the values are then transferred to the commodity labour-power through the individual consumption of these domestic labour products (the means of subsistence). Thus, the transfer of the values of the means of production, bought with the wage, to the commodity labour-power, is mediated through domestic labour.

Here we come to the heart of the matter. I have said that the puzzle can be resolved if one considers domestic labour to have as one of its properties the capacity to preserve value by transferring it to the product in the labour process; but the only kind of labour which has such a property is, by definition, <u>commodity producing, and thus, value creating labour</u>. If domestic labour can transfer value in the manner described above, then it must <u>itself</u> be a form of commodity producing

labour; and, if by the performance of domestic labour value is transferred from the means of production to the products of labour, and thence to the commodity labour-power, then this very expenditure of labour must also signify the creation of new value which is similarly embodied in the products of domestic labour and subsequently transferred to labour-power via individual consumption.

The capacity to transfer value on the one hand, and to create new value on the other, are the inseparable dual properties of commodity producing labour, inseparable because simultaneously effected in one and the same labour process. This is made clear in Marx's treatment of the transfer and creation of value in the capitalist labour process,(17) he notes:

> "The worker does not perform two pieces of work simultaneously, one in order to add value to the cotton, the other in order to preserve the value of the means of production, or, what amounts to the same thing, to transfer to the yarn, as product, the value of the cotton on which he works, and part of the value of the spindle with which he works. But by the very act of adding new value he preserves their former values. Since however the addition of new value to the material of his labour, and the preservation of its former value, are two entirely distinct results, it is plain that this twofold nature of the result can be explained only by the twofold nature of his labour; it must at the same time create value through one of its properties and preserve or transfer value through another." (Marx 1976 p.307).

Here we return to the twofold character of commodity producing labour, as human labour in general, in the abstract, and as concrete, useful labour:

> "On the one hand, it is by virtue of its general character as expenditure of human labour-power in the abstract that spinning adds new value to the values of the cotton and the spindle; and on the other hand, it is by virtue of its special character as a concrete, useful process that the same labour of spinning both transfers the values of the means of production to the product and preserves them in the product. Hence a twofold result emerges within the same period of time." (Marx 1976 pp.308-309).

Finally:

> "This shows that the two properties of labour, by virtue of which it is enabled in one case to preserve value and in the other to create value, within the same indivisible process, are different in their very essence." (Marx 1976 p.309: my emphasis).

We can see from these quotations, and from reading the relevant sections in Capital, that Marx, having established that value is created in the labour process, is concerned to show how the values of the means of production are transferred to the products of labour, in the same labour process. Thus he demonstrates that the value creating, and value preserving properties, are inseparably united in one and the same labour activity.(18) My aim here has been to demonstrate this same inseparable unity, but from the opposite direction. I first established that domestic labour must have as one of its properties the capacity to transfer value, then attempted to show from this that domestic labour must also create new value. Thus the original starting point that domestic labour is a form commodity producing, value creating labour is confirmed. Therefore it can be concluded once again that domestic labour creates, in part, the value of labour-power, and transfers the value of the wage goods which enter the domestic labour process

as means of production, to the commodity labour-power.

To summarise: the constituent parts of the value of the commodity labour-power are as follows:

i) The value of means of subsistence bought with wages that do not enter the domestic labour process at any point, but which enter directly into individual consumption. Here, value is transferred to labour-power via individual consumption.

ii) The value of those wage goods which enter into the domestic labour process as means of production in one way or another. The values of these means of production are transferred to labour-power in two stages, first they are preserved in the immediate products of the domestic labour process, then they are transferred to labour-power via individual consumption. The transfer of this value is mediated through domestic labour.

iii) The new value created by domestic labour in the domestic labour process, which is embodied in the commodity labour-power through the individual consumption of the material products and services of domestic labour.

10. The Magnitude of Value Produced by Domestic Labour: The Productivity and Intensity of Labour

In this section I will concentrate solely upon

that part of the value of labour-power which is created by domestic labour; abstraction is thus made from other values transferred to labour-power. The issue that must be examined here is the quantity of value created by domestic labour. We have seen that in the exchange of commodities, the labour contained within them is reduced to <u>average social labour</u>. Therefore, when domestic labour confronts all other commodity producing labour through the exchange of labour-power for a wage, it is reduced to a definite quantity of average social commodity producing labour. We also know that the magnitude of value created by domestic labour will be determined not by the actual labour-time expended, but by the labour-time socially necessary for the production of labour-power. It is therefore necessary to examine the relationship between domestic labour as concrete useful labour and average social labour on the one hand, and the relationship between the time spent performing domestic labour (domestic labour-time) and socially necessary labour-time on the other. In order to do this, it is necessary to think in terms of averages. The actual amount of labour-time expended in the reproduction of labour-power during a day, or year, obviously varies from one family, or individual, to the next.(19) To measure the average extensive magnitude of domestic labour necessary to reproduce, for example, the labour-power of a single working class family, one would have to add together all the minutes and hours in which domestic labour is actually performed each day and then calculate the average daily necessary domestic labour-

time. Using an arbitrary figure for the purposes of illustration I will assume that in order to reproduce the commodity labour-power, it is necessary that six hours of domestic labour is performed each day of the week in the reproduction of a single working class family.

Within a capitalist economy, average social labour - the substance of value - is social labour which is of average intensity and average productivity. This is most clearly expressed in Capital Volume One in the chapter National Differences in Wages:

> "In every country there is a certain average intensity of labour, below which the labour for the production of a commodity requires more than the time socially necessary, and therefore does not count as labour of normal quality." (Marx 1976 pp.701-702).

and

> "In proportion as capitalist production is developed in a country, so, in the same proportion, do the national intensity and productivity of labour there rise above the international average." (Marx 1976 p.702).

How, precisely, do the intensity (or intensive magnitude) and the productivity of labour effect the quantity of value objectified in commodities?

Marx examined the intensity of labour in Volume One in relation to the development of large-scale industry and machinery. The intensification, by the capitalist, of the workers' labour, imposed upon them:

> "...an increased expenditure of labour within a time which remains constant, a heightened tension of labour-power, and a closer filling up of the pores of the working day, i.e. a condensation of labour, to a degree which can only be obtained within the limits

> of a shortened working day. This compression of a greater mass of labour into a given period now counts for what it really is, namely an increase in the quantity of labour. In addition to the measures of its 'extensive magnitude', labour-time now acquires a measure of its intensity, or degree of density. The denser hour of the 10-hour working day contains more labour, i.e. expended labour-power, than the more porous hour of the 12-hour working day. Thus the product of one of the 10 hours has as much value as the product of 1 1/5 of the 12 hours, or even more." (Marx 1976 p.534).

From this we see that the more intensive the labour is, the more value it creates in a given period of time. To put it another way, the intensity of labour is inversely related to the labour-time socially necessary for the production of a commodity.

The productivity of labour effects not the amount of value produced in any given period of time, but the quantity of commodities over which this value is spread. The higher the productivity of labour, the greater is the amount of commodities that can be produced in the same period of time. This, of course, effects both the amount of labour-time necessary to produce any given quantity of commodities, and the labour-time necessary to produce any single commodity. Thus the values of commodities are subject to change with variations in the productivity of labour:

> "...the same change in productivity which increases the fruitfulness of labour, and therefore the amount of use-value produced by it, also brings about a reduction in the value of this increased total amount, if it cuts down the total amount of labour-time necessary to produce the use-values." (Marx 1976 p.137).

In short, "The value of commodities stands in inverse

ratio to the productivity of labour" (Marx 1976 p.436).

Thus the productivity, as well as the intensity of labour, determines the labour-time socially necessary for the production of a commodity, and hence, the quantity of social value objectified in it. The overall average social productivity and intensity of all commodity producing labour in a society at any point in time is determined by each rise and fall in the average productivity and intensity of labour within the various branches of production.(20) Thus within each branch of production there is an average productivity and intensity of labour, and hence a socially necessary labour-time for the production of any one commodity. In exchange, this commodity will count only as "...an average sample of its kind" (Marx 1976 p.130), since the labour contained within it is reduced to a definite quantity of average social labour.(21)

We now have to consider the results of the exchange of commodities which have objectified in them labour that is either above, or below, the average productivity and average intensity of social labour. First, what are the effects if the productivity of labour is above the average within its branch of production? When an individual capitalist introduces improved methods of production into the labour process so that the employees' productivity of labour is increased above the average in that branch of production, an increased, 'extra' amount of surplus-value can be appropriated by the capitalist until the new conditions of production are adopted by his

competitors, and a new average productivity of labour is established. As long as his advantage pertains, the capitalist can sell his commodities below their social value determined by the socially necessary labour-time under the old conditions of production, but above their individual value determined by the decreased labour-time necessary to produce them under the new conditions. It is the competition which arises from this that drives other capitalists to adopt the new methods of production:

> "The law of the determination of value by labour-time makes itself felt to the individual capitalist who applies the new method of production by compelling him to sell his goods under their social value; this same law, acting as a coercive law of competition, forces his competitors to adopt the new method." (Marx 1976 p.436).

But what if labour is below the average productivity of social labour in general, or within particular branches of production? By contrast, it is only to the disadvantage of the independent commodity producer or the capitalist. For example:

> "The introduction of power looms into England... probably reduced by one half the labour required to convert a given quantity of yarn into woven fabric. In order to do this, the English hand-loom weaver in fact needed the same amount of labour-time as before; but the product of his individual hour of labour now only represented half an hour of social labour, and consequently fell to one half its former value." (Marx 1976 p.129).

Here we see that labour of below average productivity does not count directly as socially necessary labour which alone determines the social value of the

commodity; to put it another way, of the time expended in labour of below average productivity, only a proportion will count as socially necessary labour-time. Thus only half the labour-time of the hand-loom weaver represented socially necessary labour-time because his/her labour was only half as productive as average labour under the prevailing conditions of production.(22) The same quantity of value was produced in one hour by the hand-loom weaver as was produced in only half-an-hour by the worker with the power loom. Historically, the hard truth was revealed to the hand-loom weavers in the exchange of their products; their commodities were treated only as average samples of their kind through the reduction of the labour objectified in them to definite quantities of average social labour. Unable to compete with cheap woven fabrics produced by the capitalists in possession of power looms at the beginning of the 19th century, the hand-loom weavers were doomed.

The same principles operate in relation to labour of below average intensity. If a worker labours for one hour but his/her labour is only half as intensive as average social labour, then the amount of value produced in one hour by the less intensive labour will be equivalent to the magnitude of value produced in only half-an-hour of average social labour.

To conclude: if, for example, the labour of a particular commodity producer is only half as productive and half as intensive as average social labour and it takes four hours to produce one commodity, then in

exchange, the labour embodied in this commodity will be reduced to average social labour; in four hours, only one hour of social value will have been produced, because only one quarter of the actual labour-time will count as socially necessary labour-time. However, as we saw in the example of the hand-loom weaver, less productive and less intensive labour is largely eliminated through the operation of the laws of competition, that is, in the final analysis by the law of value; this applies to labour within both capitalist and simple commodity relations of production.

We can now return to the examination of the quantity of value produced by domestic labour. It is necessary to consider the average extensive and intensive magnitudes of domestic labour as well as its average productivity. The difficulties in obtaining actual measurements are obviously enormous; I shall use arbitrary, assumed figures here for the purposes of illustration.

It is an obvious fact that the productivity of labour within the domestic sphere is considerably lower than commodity producing labour within capitalist production relations. Establishing the precise ratio between the two, both at the present stage of capitalist development and historically, is probably an impossibility. One can only guess at the increase in this ratio as productivity within in the capitalist sphere of production has risen. The capitalist is constantly driven to raise his employees' productivity as the chief means of

increasing the rate of surplus-value:

> "Given the general basis of the capitalist system, a point is reached in the course of accumulation at which the development of the productivity of social labour becomes the most powerful lever of accumulation." (Marx 1976 p.772).

Within simple commodity relations of production generally, commodities are produced not in order to appropriate surplus-value, but as the means of obtaining, via exchange, other use-values which can satisfy individual needs (C-M-C). While the simple commodity producer has an interest in raising the productivity of his/her own labour, to improve efficiency or increase output, the increase in productivity that can be achieved within the technological and social constraints of small scale, individualised production, is very limited. The gigantic advance in the development of the productive forces under capitalism has been achieved through the transformation of commodity production based upon individual private property into the capitalist form of commodity production: "Where the basis is the production of commodities, large-scale production can only occur in a capitalist form" (Marx 1976 p.775).

The productivity of domestic labour, as a specific form of simple commodity production, has undoubtedly increased under capitalism. Indeed, apart from the subjective desire to improve efficiency of labour in the home, objective factors have also served to raise productivity, for example, the mass production by capital of means of production for the domestic labour process, of

'labour saving devices' such as cookers, fridges, vacuum cleaners, washing machines and so on. The general improvement in the material conditions of working class life over the last two centuries has contributed to a decrease in time necessary for the performance of some household tasks as we shall see in later chapters. Nevertheless, one only has to compare the time taken to produce use-values in the domestic sphere with that necessary to produce the same, or similar, articles in the capitalist labour process, in the food processing, clothing and cleaning industries for example, to get some idea of the very large divergence between the average productivity of household and capitalist labour.

Let's assume here that domestic labour is twenty times less productive than average social labour: that the productivity ratio of average social labour to domestic labour is 20:1 - the actual ratio is probably greater than this.(23) Abstracting for the moment from labour intensities, what happens when the product of domestic labour, i.e. the commodity labour-power, is exchanged? The result has been anticipated. When the commodity labour-power is sold, the labour contained within it is reduced to a definite quantity of average social labour. If the domestic labour necessary to produce this commodity is twenty times less productive than average social labour, then only one twentieth of the necessary domestic labour-time will count as socially necessary labour-time; thus for every <u>hour</u> of domestic labour, only <u>three minutes</u> of socially necessary labour will have been performed, and

only three minutes of value will have been created. In six hours of domestic labour, only eighteen minutes of the actual labour-time would represent socially necessary labour-time, and only eighteen minutes of value would have been produced. There exists, therefore, a tremendous disproportionality between actual domestic labour-time and the magnitude of value created in that time. In short, because the productivity of domestic labour is considerably below that of average commodity producing labour, large amounts of domestic labour-time result in the production of only very small quantities of value.

We must now consider the intensity of domestic labour as compared with average social labour. Once again, one can only speculate about the precise nature of the divergence in average intensities. However, it is obviously the case that labour performed within wage-labour relations is significantly more intensive than domestic labour. This is not, of course, to detract from the exhausting and laborious character of many domestic labour tasks; but the capitalist, driven by the thirst for more surplus-value, must not only constantly raise the productivity of his employees' labour, but also maximise the intensity of their labour:

> "Capital's tendency, as soon as the prolongation of the hours of labour is once for all forbidden, is to compensate for this by systematically raising the intensity of labour, and converting every improvement in machinery into a more perfect means for soaking up labour-power." (Marx 1976 p.542).

Particularly after the implementation of factory

legislation effectively shortening the working day in the mid-19th century, labour was greatly intensified as Marx demonstrates in Capital Volume One. This was achieved partly as a result of the natural ability of workers to work harder for fewer hours, but mainly through the application of machinery:

> "The shortening of the working day creates, to begin with, the subjective condition for the condensation of labour, i.e. makes it possible for the worker to set more labour-power in motion within a given time. As soon as that shortening becomes compulsory, machinery becomes in the hands of capital the objective means, systematically employed, for squeezing out more labour in a given time. This occurs in two ways: the speed of the machines is increased, and the same worker receives a greater quantity of machinery to supervise or operate." (Marx 1976 p.536).

Commodity producing labour within capitalist relations is thus of an extremely intensive kind; the extraction of a sustained effort from the worker is essential to achieve the "...closer filling up of the pores of the working day" (Marx 1976 p.534).

As noted earlier, the effect of the intensification of labour is to increase the amount of labour performed in any given time, and hence also, the quantity of value produced in that time. Again, as a form of simple commodity production, domestic labour is not subject to capital's drive to intensify labour. The intensity of domestic labour is of course affected by objective factors such as the weight of the burden of labour tasks and the time available for labour in the home; employed women, for example, have to perform

domestic labour in their 'non-working' hours and consequently often labour more intensively in the domestic labour sphere than full-time domestic labourers. Some tasks require a more intensive application of labour than others. However, the domestic labourer is not subject to the discipline of the capitalist labour process and can, to some extent, determine the intensity of labour. The development of domestic electrical appliances, plastics, synthetic fabrics, cleaning agents and so on, has also had an effect in reducing both the amount of domestic labour-time necessary to perform certain tasks and the intensity of labour involved. For example, one only has to compare the physically and mentally exhausting labour of the weekly wash in the earlier part of this century (see Chapter Seven) with the task of laundering today with the aid of automatic washing machines (for those working class families that have one), soap powders, detergents, drying facilities, electric irons and so forth, to see the reduction in labour intensity that has occurred.

Let's assume that domestic labour is on average only one third as intensive as average social labour.(24) Under these conditions (abstracting from labour productivity), in six hours of domestic labour, only two hours of social value will be created. Although the causes are different, the effect is therefore similar to that resulting from the divergence in productivity levels between domestic and average social labour; once again, only a small proportion of actual domestic labour-time will count as socially necessary labour-time when the

commodity labour-power is sold and domestic labour is reduced to average social labour and equated with all other commodity producing labour accordingly.

What is the combined effect of these differences in labour productivity and intensity? How much value will be created in six hours of domestic labour if both factors are taken into account? If domestic labour is twenty times less productive, and only one third as intensive as average social labour, then six hours of domestic labour will be equivalent to only six minutes of average social labour; in six hours of domestic labour, only six minutes will count as socially necessary labour-time, and only six minutes of value will have been created. Thus one can conclude that, in equivalent periods of time, the quantity of new value created within the household is but a fraction of that created within the capitalist labour process.

It is frequently argued in the Domestic Labour Debate that domestic labour is not subject to the law of value, and, by reverse logical deduction, that domestic labour cannot therefore be commodity producing labour. However, the striking result obtained in the above analysis - that a tremendous disparity exists between actual domestic labour-time on the one hand, and the relatively miniscule amount of value created by this labour, on the other - is precisely a direct expression of the operation of the law of value in commodity exchange. It is the law of value which asserts itself in the fact that only a fraction of domestic labour-time counts as

socially necessary labour-time.

From the point of view of commodity production in general, such an assertion of the law of value usually results, in the final analysis, in the redistribution of social labour within, and between, branches of production, such that labour of below average intensity or productivity is eliminated. Competition forces independent commodity producers and capitalists alike to adopt new methods of production such that only socially necessary labour-time, or something approximating closely to it, is expended in production, thus:

> "It is true that the different spheres of production constantly tend towards equilibrium, for the following reason. On the one hand, every producer of a commodity is obliged to produce a use-value, i.e. he must satisfy a particular social need... on the other hand, the law of value of commodities ultimately determines how much of its disposable labour-time society can expend on each kind of commodity. But this constant tendency on the part of various spheres of production towards equilibrium comes into play only as a reaction against the constant upsetting of this equilibrium." (Marx 1976 p.476).

The question which arises, therefore, is why has domestic labour continued to exist? Why hasn't the operation of the law of value brought about its transcendence by capitalist commodity production such that the means of subsistence necessary for the reproduction of labour-power are <u>entirely</u> produced within capitalist production relations? Here we touch upon such fundamental questions as the origin of domestic labour, and its historical development in the capitalist epoch. These questions are dealt with in later chapters and it is only

necessary to make a few general points here.

The ability and/or willingness of individual capitals, or the capitalist class as a whole via its state, to provide in their entirety the means of subsistence for the working class, has in the past, and continues, to depend on various economic, political and ideological factors. Fundamentally, the level of development of the productive forces under capitalism has dictated, at each stage, the objective, technical possibility of the mass production of the means of consumption capitalistically. Thus, which means of consumption can be produced with capitalist production relations, whether consumption goods leave the capitalist labour process as finished or unfinished articles, and the quality of capitalistically produced means of consumption - are all factors dependent to a large degree on the technical basis, organisation and methods of production, and the level of development of skill, science and so on. It was not until the last few decades of the 19th century, for example, that the productive forces were sufficiently developed to facilitate the mass production of many of the means of consumption, especially food products, necessary for the reproduction of labour-power, and these were not generally produced in finally consumable form. Further, rather than leading towards the elimination of domestic labour, the development of the productive forces under capitalism, particularly in the 20th century, has resulted in the mass production precisely of means of <u>production</u> for the domestic sphere.

Secondly, it is the criteria of profitability, not social need, that determines which use-values may or may not be produced capitalistically. Many of the labour tasks at one time performed in the domestic sphere have been partially, or in some cases wholly, removed from the home and incorporated into the capitalist labour process as the development of the productive forces has provided the objective conditions for such profitable production. That the development of the forces of production has come into contradiction with capitalist property relations is expressed in the fact that the objective material conditions for the true 'socialisaton' of most domestic labour tasks now exist, but the burden of reproducing labour-power continues to fall primarily upon working class women who must daily perform hours of oppressive, privatised, individualised labour in the home.

Thirdly, the political struggle between the classes, and the ideological importance of the family for both the working and capitalist classes (for different reasons), have been important factors affecting on the one hand, the conscious defence of the 'domestic' sphere, and on the other hand, the degree to which the capitalist class, through the state, has taken over responsibility for important aspects of the reproduction of labour-power where individual capitals could, or would, not; for example, the state provision of housing, health care, education, childcare, welfare benefits and so on. The development of the welfare state represents a gain for the working class won in struggle, but a gain the state was

able and even willing to concede. The degree to which state welfare provision represents a real tax on capital's surplus- value appropriation, or simply a redistribution between sections of the working class of that part of the social product allotted to the class as a whole, is obviously an important question here.

Domestic labour continues to confront the working class as an objective necessity. While the law of value expresses itself in terms of the quantity of value created by domestic labour, it comes up against real, material factors which prevent the complete redistribution of social labour from the domestic labour sphere to the capitalist sphere of production. The very fact that the commodity labour-power is inseparable from the living individual means that the law of value cannot, and does not, rigidly subordinate the production of this commodity to its redistributive powers. Normally, the over-production of a particular kind of commodity is resolved through the redistribution of social labour; but if the commodity labour-power is 'over-produced' relative to capital's requirements, the cessation of its production would of course mean the cessation of life itself. While it is true that the unemployed and unemployable were simply left to perish for long periods in capitalist history, the working class has secured, through organised struggle, partial state responsibility for the material support of the unemployed. The reproduction of labour-power, and hence the performance of domestic labour must continue even when labour-power cannot be sold. In fact,

Marx makes it clear in Capital Volume One, that it actually becomes a condition of capital accumulation that labour-power is 'over-produced', i.e. that a reserve army of labour is maintained. As soon as capital is dependent upon the production of relative surplus-value, it is a general law of accumulation that the organic composition of capital rises, producing a reserve army of labour whose existence in turn becomes indispensable for further accumulation:

> "But if a surplus population of workers is a necessary product of accumulation or the development of wealth on a capitalist basis, this superfluous population also becomes, conversely, the lever of capitalist accumulation, indeed it becomes a condition for the existence of the capitalist mode of production. It forms an industrial reserve army, which belongs to capital just as absolutely as if the latter had bred it at its own cost." (Marx 1976 p.784).

Finally, the commodity form of labour-power does impose itself upon the domestic labour process as a determining factor. Workers compete with one another to secure and maintain employment; in order to compete successfully, labour-power must be daily and generationally reproduced to a standard 'normal' under the given social conditions:

> "If the owner of labour-power works today, tomorrow he must again be able to repeat the same process in the same conditions as regards health and strength. His means of subsistence must therefore be sufficient to maintain him in his normal state as a working individual." (Marx 1976 p.275).

Thus, the performance of domestic labour itself is

compelled to meet certain social requirements in terms of its regularity, quantity and quality. The question of the law of value is discussed further in Chapter Four.

11. The Tendency for the Value of Labour-power to Rise, and Other Countervailing Tendencies

According to Marx's pure form theoretical conception presented in Capital, the value of labour-power is determined by the value of the means of subsistence bought with the wage; this value is simply transferred to the commodity labour-power through the individual consumption of the means of subsistence. If, for example, the weekly wage is £100, then every week the value of £100 is transferred to the commodity labour-power via the individual consumption of means of subsistence bought with this wage.(25)

Through concretisation, it has been established that the value embodied in the commodity labour-power is composed not only of the value of commodities purchased with the wage but also, in part (albeit a small part) of new value created by domestic labour. As we have seen, most wage goods enter the domestic labour process as means of production of one kind or another, and their values are preserved by being transferred to labour-power in the labour process; but domestic labour thus expended not only transfers value, it simultaneously produces new, additional value. Therefore, the value of the commodity labour-power is composed, on the one hand of the value of

wage goods transferred to labour-power, and on the other hand, of new value created by domestic labour.

Although the new value produced by domestic labour constitutes a very small proportion of the total value of labour-power, this additional value upsets the equilibrium between the value embodied in the wage on the one hand, and the value embodied in the commodity labour-power on the other, which characterises Marx's schema of reproduction. In fact (everything else remaining the same), as a result of the new value produced by domestic labour, there exists, analytically, a tendency for the value of labour-power to rise.

This tendency can best be illustrated by the following example in which the previously assumed figures expressing the relative productivity and intensity of domestic and capitalist labour are used again. Consider a single family living on a weekly wage of £100; every day of the week (i.e. seven days) six hours is spent in the performance of domestic labour resulting in the creation of six minutes of value each day. In one week, therefore, 42 minutes of new value is created by domestic labour. Let's assume further, that in one hour of average social labour, the quantity of value produced is equivalent to £5.

If a value of £5 is created in one hour by average social labour, then in the six minutes of domestic labour-time which each day count as socially necessary, a value of 50 pence will be produced.(26) Therefore, in one week, domestic labour will create a value of £3.50. Now,

it is assumed that the weekly wage is paid at the beginning of each week.(27) During the first week, this £100 will be spent on items which pass through the domestic labour process. The value of the wage goods (totalling £100) will, in the course of the week, be transferred to labour-power; but in this process, 42 hours of domestic labour will have been performed producing an additional value of £3.50 which is also, by the end of the week, embodied in labour-power. Thus, at the end of this first week, the total value now objectified in labour-power will be equivalent to £103.50.

At the beginning of the second week, the weekly wage of £100 is again paid, and once again is converted into wage goods, the value of which is transferred to labour-power through the domestic labour process. Domestic labour will create an additional value of £3.50, and the total value embodied in labour-power in the course of this second week is again equivalent to £103.50. The same pattern will occur in the following weeks. At the end of the first two weeks, the total value embodied in labour-power will, of course, be £207, composed as follows:

£200 of value transferred from wage goods to labour-power

£7 of new value created by domestic labour

Looking at the result over a whole year, the annual wage will be £5,200 (£100 x 52), but £182 of new value will

have been created by domestic labour during the year. Thus, the total value embodied in labour-power in the course of one year is £5,382 - composed as follows:

£5,200 of value transferred from wage goods to labour-power

£182 of new value created by domestic labour

In each cycle of its reproduction, therefore, the value of the commodity labour-power has increased in proportion to the amount of new value produced by domestic labour. This is what is meant by the tendency of the value of labour-power to rise as a result of value created by domestic labour. In this example, the value of labour-power has increased by 3.5 per cent over one year. In practice, one would expect such a percentage increase to be much smaller given the undoubtedly huge disparity between the productivity and intensity of domestic labour and average social labour. However, the question which arises is, does this tendency manifest itself in practice, in reality?

If we abstract for the moment from all other tendencies and factors which may have a bearing upon the value of labour-power, it is obvious that the tendency for the value of labour-power to rise would operate directly contrary to the interests of capital. We must assume here that commodities, including the commodity labour-power, will on the average, exchange at their values,(28) i.e. that the value created by domestic labour will be realised

in the form of wage increases over time to compensate for, and establish general equivalence with, the rising value of labour-power. If all other circumstances remained the same, increasing wages would of course mean a decreasing rate of surplus-value for capital; the tendency for the value of labour-power to rise would manifest itself in the gradual extension of necessary labour-time and the curtailment of surplus labour-time.

However, this is not the only tendency operating within capitalism; everything else does not remain the same. Historically, the value of labour-power has been subject to the operation of other tendencies and factors, the most important of which must now be discussed. The first concerns the production of relative surplus-value. With the advent of large-scale industry, and especially after the implementation of the Factory Acts limiting the hours of work from the mid-19th century, capital became dependent upon raising the productivity of labour as the chief method of increasing the rate of surplus-value. By raising the productivity of labour, the means of consumption necessary for the reproduction of the working class are cheapened and the value of labour-power falls.(29) This in turn reduces necessary labour-time and lengthens surplus labour-time so that the rate of surplus-value is increased:

> "The objective of the development of the productivity of labour within the context of capitalist production is the shortening of that part of the working day in which the worker must work for himself, and the lengthening thereby, of the other part of the day, in which he is free to work for nothing for the

capitalist." (Marx 1976 p.438).

In short

> "...an increase in the productivity of labour causes a fall in the value of labour-power and a consequent rise in surplus-value, while, on the other hand, a decrease in the productivity of labour, causes a rise in the value of labour-power and a fall in surplus-value." (Marx 1976 p.657).

Surplus-value produced in this manner, i.e. relative surplus-value, has been the main source of profit throughout the period of industrial capitalism, and the raising of the productivity of labour has meant that, for long periods between major crises, capital has been able to tolerate a shortening of the working day and a rise in the material standards of living of the working class, since this became compatible with capital accumulation.

Throughout capitalist history, but especially in the period of industrial capitalism, therefore, the accumulation of capital has proceeded in association with what can be called here, a <u>tendency for the value of labour-power to fall</u>. The tendency for the value of labour-power to rise as a result of value created by domestic labour will have been entirely offset by the operation of this far stronger tendency for the value of labour-power to fall. As we have seen, the rate of increase in the value of labour-power which results from domestic labour is extremely small; on the other hand the value of labour-power has been reduced with every increase in the productivity of labour in those branches of capitalist production that determine the value of the means of consumption. In the interaction of these

conflicting tendencies, therefore, the tendency for the value of labour-power to fall has predominated; as the infinitely stronger tendency, it has negated the other and won out as the determining force affecting the actual value of labour-power, and so, in the final analysis, the level of wages at any point in time. Thus, in answer to the original question concerning the manifestation, or not, of the tendency for the value of labour-power to rise, one must conclude that while this tendency does indeed operate as a real force, it does not manifest itself as such in any actual secular increase in the value of labour-power.

The second factor concerns domestic and capitalist productivity levels. In the discussion about the relative productivity levels within the domestic and capitalist spheres of production, and of average social labour, it was assumed that domestic labour was many times less productive than average social labour. I would argue that this has been the case throughout capitalist history generally, but that as a result of the continual raising of the productivity of labour within the capitalist sphere, the productivity ratio between domestic labour and capitalist labour has steadily increased as the gap between the two has widened. Despite the increase in the productivity of domestic labour itself, the overall effect of the increasing divergence between domestic and average social labour has been to continually decrease the proportion of actual domestic labour-time which counts as socially necessary labour-time, and hence also to decrease

the quantity of value created by domestic labour. Thus while the tendency for the value of labour-power to rise exists, the rate of increase of the value of labour-power in this connection may have been decreasing over time.(30)

Thirdly, it has been assumed thus far that labour-power always exchanges at its value. The assumption must form the starting point of any analysis of domestic labour, as it does for Marx in the analysis of commodity production and exchange in general. However, the law of value does not assert itself in a direct, mechanical fashion but, "...under capitalist production, the general law acts as the prevailing tendency only in a very complicated and approximate manner, as a never ascertainable average of ceaseless fluctuations" (Marx, cited in Preobrazhensky 1965 p.46). Thus commodity prices, including the price of the commodity labour-power expressed in the wage, deviate from their values in one or other direction:

> "The possibility, therefore, of a quantitative incongruity between price and magnitude of value, i.e. the possibility that the price may diverge from the magnitude of value, is inherent in the price-form itself. This is not a defect, but, on the contrary, it makes this form the adequate one for the mode of production whose laws can only assert themselves as blindly operating averages between constant irregularities." (Marx 1976 p.196).

There are various forces which act upon the price of the commodity labour-power and influence the degree of divergence of the wage from the real value of labour-power at any time. For example, the struggle between capital and labour to decrease or increase the wage respectively, is

central, but takes place within the context of the movements in capital accumulation which create the objective conditions for this struggle. Thus, wages will generally rise in periods of an accelerated rate of accumulation, and fall when accumulation slackens. The industrial reserve army of labour is, as has already been noted, a product of the process of capital accumulation and acts, in turn, as a means of keeping wages down, and periods of deep crises serve to fundamentally reduce wages and create the conditions for renewed accumulation. Therefore, while the interaction of the tendencies described above will determine the actual value of labour-power, the relationship between the value and the price of labour-power expressed in the wage depends on many other factors and circumstances. However, the law of value asserts itself throughout in the manner described above, because it is around the true value of the commodity labour-power that its price will fluctuate and diverge and which at root regulates the exchange of this commodity.

12. Summary

The concretisation of Marx's schema of the reproduction of the working class leads to the inescapable conclusion that domestic labour not only transfers to labour-power the value of the wage goods productively consumed in the domestic labour process, but at one and the same time creates new value which enters as a constituent part into the value of the commodity labour-

power. The amount of new value created by domestic labour is (relatively) small because it's average levels of productivity and intensity are significantly below that of socially average commodity producing labour. Nevertheless, the creation of new value in the domestic labour process continuously adds value to the commodity labour-power (that is, in consecutive cycles of reproduction). Should this addition of value go unchecked, a tendency for the value of labour-power to rise would manifest itself in the extension of necessary labour-time at the expense of surplus labour-time, and thus undermine capital accumulation. However, historically, this tendency has been negated in it's interaction with several countervailing tendencies such that the overall trend has been a (relative) secular decline in the value of labour-power.

13. Conclusion

To conclude: there are no 'benefits' or 'disadvantages' which accrue to capital on a strictly economic level by the existence of domestic labour as a value creating form of production. My analysis does not enable me to announce some grandiose conclusion to the effect that unpaid household labour enables the capitalist to produce more, or less, surplus-value than would be the case if domestic labour did not exist, nor conversely, that domestic labour exists because it augments the production of surplus-value. The most that can be said as

far as the 'interests' of capital are concerned, is that the existence of domestic labour, despite the tendency for the value of labour-power to rise connected with it, does not eat away at the foundation of capital accumulation. All this is hardly surprising. Unlike many contributors to the Debate, I did not start out with the intention of explaining the existence of domestic labour by the benefits it endows upon capital (or men). I did not feel constrained to produce an analysis that contained an economic rationalisation for the persistence of household labour in general, or women's household labour in particular, in terms of its role in the provision of surplus-value for the capitalist, or surplus labour for an oppressor sex. Such a method was characterised in Chapter One as functionalist and idealist. The existence of domestic labour is explained by other factors which are explored in subsequent chapters.

What the analysis in this chapter does lay bare is the type, or form, of production represented by household labour in our epoch. It is a unique form of production: a combination, or synthesis, of direct subsistence and simple commodity production. It is only from a correct understanding on this point that answers can be sought to other crucial questions. Only once the specific form of unpaid labour carried out in the home under capitalism has been identified can one begin to distinguish domestic labour from other forms of non-wage labour 'in the home', for example, pre-capitalist (and in many parts of the world, contemporary) independent peasant

production. In turn, distinguishing between historically different forms of 'household production' enables one to identify the origins of capitalist domestic labour, and to examine its development in connection with the evolution of the predominant system of production with which it coexits - the capitalist system of commodity production. Finally, it is necessary to point out that the confusion in the Domestic Labour Debate in itself justifies such a lengthy analysis of the nature of domestic production, especially of the commodity producing, value creating aspect of this production. The most important objections that could be made to my 'value thesis' on the basis of the arguments and positions advanced in the Debate are discussed in Chapter Four.

It remains, however, to make one final but important point about another way in which domestic labour determines the value of labour-power. This relates to Marx's 'historical and moral element'. We have seen how in Marx's schema the means of subsistence are capitalistically produced in finished form and enter directly into individual consumption. In the concretised analysis, the wage is exchanged, in the main, not for finished means of subsistence, but for articles which serve as means of production for domestic labour. Thus the level of the wage is determined (everything else remaining the same) not by the value of means of subsistence in finished form as in Marx's schema, but to a very large extent, by the value of the means of production for household labour. The level of the wage will be based, at

any stage in capitalist development, on the quantity and quality of domestic means of production required for the reproduction of labour-power under the 'normal' conditions of the day. The point is, of course, that like the finished means of subsistence in Marx's schema, the domestic means of production are historically variable both as use-values and exchange-values, and therefore effect the value of the commodity labour-power differentially over time. Thus, the level of development of household labour itself becomes an important factor in relation to the 'historical and moral element' determining the value of labour-power, affecting as it does, "...the conditions in which, and consequently ...the habits and expectations with which, the class of free workers has been formed" (Marx 1976 p.275).

Like other forms of production, household labour possesses a dynamic quality, and one of the factors involved in shaping the development of household production is the struggle of the working class itself to raise the standards and quality of material life <u>through</u> domestic labour. This theme is developed in Chapter Five, in the final section of which I return once again to the question of the transfer and creation of value in the domestic labour process.

CHAPTER THREE

THE HISTORICAL ORIGIN OF DOMESTIC LABOUR

Having identified the form of production represented by household labour in our society it is now possible to consider its historical origin. As a particular unity of subsistence production and commodity production, domestic labour differs on the one hand from all other forms of subsistence production based upon land ownership (for example, independent peasant production), and on the other hand, from all other forms of simple and capitalist commodity production in which all kinds of commodity are produced with the exception of the commodity labour-power.(1) Household production under capitalism is thus a unique form of production bound up with the reproduction of labour-power in its commodity form. It follows from this, firstly, that domestic labour is a historically specific form of production, and secondly, that its historical development is bound up with the historical development of the capitalist mode of production itself. In order to study the origin and development of domestic labour, it is necessary to begin with the study of the origin and development of the commodity labour-power.

Marx provided us with a detailed examination of the historical transformation of labour-power into a commodity in Part Eight of Capital Volume One entitled

So-called Primitive Accumulation. To my knowledge there has been no systematic attempt to relate the emergence and development of domestic labour to Marx's study of the transformation of individual private property relations (characteristic of the period of transition from feudalism to capitalism) into capitalist private property relations.(2) It is my contention that this transformation is parallelled by another; namely, the transformation of 'traditional' subsistence and petty commodity production in 'the home' into a new and distinct form of household production associated with the reproduction of wage labourers (i.e. the commodity labour-power). What follows in the first part of this chapter is a brief analysis of this transformation based upon English experience.

1. Domestic Labour and the Emergence of Capitalism in England

In England by the end of the 14th and throughout the 15th century a very large proportion of the working population consisted of 'free peasant proprietors' who owned their land and other means of production. Independent private property relations formed the basis of i) direct subsistence production and ii) simple, or 'petty' commodity production. The members of the independent peasant household might have been engaged exclusively in subsistence production or commodity production, but more commonly in a combination of both - part of the same product being exchanged and the rest

being used as means of subsistence. These property relations had emerged out of the dissolution of feudal land relations, but were merely transitional, as they themselves were progressively dissolved through the transformation of <u>individual</u> into <u>capitalist</u> private property:

> "Private property which is personally earned, i.e. which is based, as it were, on the fusing together of the isolated independent working individual with the condition of his labour, is supplanted by capitalist private property, which rests on the exploitation of alien, but formally free labour." (Marx 1976 p.928).

Marx identified the essence of this transformation in property relations:

> "The capital relation presupposes a complete separation between the workers and the ownership of the conditions for the realisation of their labour. As soon as capitalist production stands on its own feet, it not only maintains this separation, but reproduces it on a constantly expanding scale. This process, therefore, which creates the capital relation can be nothing other than the process which divorces the worker from the conditions of his own labour; it is a process which operates two transformations, whereby the social means of subsistence and production are turned into capital, and the immediate producers are turned into wage-labourers. So-called primitive accumulation, therefore, is nothing else than the historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production. It appears "primitive" because it forms the pre-history of capital, and of the mode of production corresponding to capital." (Marx 1976 pp.874-875).

Marx described the bloody and violent methods by which the producers were separated from their means of production, involving as it did the forcible expulsion from the land of the agricultural population. Through this

separation, a class of 'free' wage labourers developed - a class dependent upon the sale of labour-power to obtain life necessities. Of course this class was not created all at once; the process of separation proceeded unevenly throughout the period of transition from feudalism to capitalism, throughout the period of capitalist manufacture (roughly the mid-16th century to the last third of the 18th century), and into the period of large-scale industry. The first phase of industrialisation (the 'Industrial Revolution' - roughly the last third of the 18th century to the 1840s) was, however, decisive in the creation of a mass proletariat. In agriculture, for example, "...the years between 1760 and 1820 are the years of wholesale enclosure, in which in village after village, common rights are lost" (Thompson 1968 p.217). The development of large-scale industry transformed the remnants of production based upon individual private property, and capitalist manufacture, into new forms - factory production, 'modern' manufacture and outwork. Thus the mass of the population became proletarians whether as factory workers, agricultural labourers, outworkers or sweated labourers in small workshops. By the end of the 19th century, large-scale industry and factory work had triumphed in most branches of production.

From this brief sketch of the historical emergence of the working class, and thus of the transformation of labour-power into a commodity, let us return to the period of transition from feudalism to capitalism and consider domestic labour in this

connection. Production in the independent peasant 'family economy' (as I shall call it for convenience), bears little relation to the household production of the industrial working class. Although it involved many of the labour tasks which are performed in the homes of wage-workers (cooking, sewing, cleaning, washing, childcare and so on), these labour tasks were enmeshed in a far more complex labour process involving a wide variety of agricultural and non-agricultural activities. Men, women and children were engaged in the production of food, yarn, woven cloth, clothing, fuel, tools, implements, and so forth, for their own subsistence requirements and for exchange. The whole complex of activities, insofar as they were directed towards subsistence production, constituted the reproduction of labour-power on the basis of individual private property relations. What happened when these relations were supplanted by capitalist relations and the mass of the population became dependent upon the sale of their labour-power? What happened, that is, to production in 'the home'?

The separation of the producers from the means of production destroyed the basis within the family economy of both petty commodity production and independent subsistence production of the traditional type which required land and other means of production now in the hands of the capitalist class. With the destruction of the material basis of the traditional family economy, the reproduction of labour-power, now a commodity sold to the owners of the means of production, was achieved through

the purchase of life necessities - shelter, food, warmth and clothing - with wages. But these commodities purchased with the wage were not in finished, finally consumable form; additional labour was necessary within the working class family, labour which was unpaid and which transformed the wage goods into consumable means of subsistence. Thus a new form of subsistence production developed, new because it was based on a very limited private ownership of capitalistically produced means of production which were specifically adapted to the urban, industrial proletarian sphere. Out of the family economy based on the association of the producers and the means of production, through the separation of the former from the latter, there remains, or rather crystallises out a collection of 'household' tasks bound up with the reproduction of a class dependent on selling its labour-power, bound up with the production and reproduction of the commodity labour-power. Of course, between the period of transition from feudalism to capitalism and 19th century industrial capitalism, a variety of combined or 'transitional' forms of family production existed - traditional subsistence production, petty commodity production, and 'embryonic' household labour necessary for the reproduction of wage-labourers. But by the mid-19th century, the majority of working class families, particularly in the urban areas, had made the transition to the 'modern' form of subsistence production associated with dependence on waged work.

To summarise, the historical development of

capitalist commodity production was premised on the separation of the producers from their means of production, but in the process, a new and distinct form of production, domestic labour, also developed; many of the labour tasks were not of course new, but the conditions in which they were performed were, and their delineation from other labour tasks which had for centuries been performed within the home created a new type of collectivity, or entity, of concrete useful labour tasks which today is popularly known as 'housework'.

Household labour was necessary to meet objective material requirements. The conditions of life confronting those families and individuals newly dependent on wage-labour were such that the reproduction of their labour-power was not possible simply and exclusively through the direct consumption of wage-goods. Additional labour upon, and with, those wage-goods was an objective necessity. Capitalism did not appear on the historical stage in 'pure form', based on a level of development of the productive forces facilitating the mass production in finished form of all the means of subsistence required by the working population. Rather it developed through a series of stages which involved the continuous transformation of both the old pre-capitalist production relations and the technical foundations of capitalist production itself, and at each stage, the production of commodities destined for the sphere of working-class consumption involved (in the main) the production of use-values which served not as direct means of subsistence but as means of production for the

domestic labour-process. In fact, only with the development of the productive forces towards the end of the 19th century was capital able to mass produce many of the essential domestic means of production required by the working class. Thus, the material conditions themselves, the process giving rise to dependence on wage-labour, at the same time gave rise to an objective need for labour on the part of the working class, outside the capitalist production process; this labour formed part of the total social labour necessary for the reproduction of that class. This household labour was, and is, shaped by the demands of the reproduction of the commodity labour-power and of the class dependent on the sale of that commodity. It is further shaped by the nature of the wage goods that are available at different stages of capitalism's development, shaped by the objective character of the products created within a system of generalised commodity production at any particular stage of its historical development.

As we shall see in Part Two, household labour itself did not appear on the historical stage in fully elaborated form. Not only was the nascent industrial working class faced with the objective necessity of domestic labour, but at the same time, it had to contend with conditions which made its performance extremely difficult. The life conditions of large sections of the population in the early industrial period actually prevented the adequate performance of this labour for their own subsistence. The length of the working day, the

employment of all or most family members, the payment of subsistence or below subsistence wages, rapid urbanisation accompanied by overcrowding in slum accommodation without piped water supplies or sufficient living space and cooking facilities: all these factors combined to create conditions in which necessary household labour was difficult or impossible to perform. The degree of exploitation ensured that adults and children were condemned to a life of drudgery, poverty, ill health and early death. Only later, in the second half of the 19th century, did conditions begin to improve for the mass of the working class. This was not simply a question of rising wages, security of employment, and political reform. Fundamental to the raising of living standards was the development and elaboration of household labour. Closely associated with the latter was the development of the role of the full-time housewife, and thus the entrenchment of the sexual division of labour within the working class family. These 19th century developments are discussed at length in Chapter Five.

On the basis of the analysis in Chapter Two and thus far in this chapter, it is now possible to return to the general historical materialist 'propositions' outlined in the final section of Chapter One. The change in the economic foundation with which the development of domestic labour is associated is the transition from feudalism to capitalism, or more specifically, the transition from production based on individual private property to that based on capitalist private property. The commodity

labour-power is the essential link between the historical origin and development of both capitalist and domestic production relations. Just as the capitalist form of production had it's roots in the separation of the direct producers from their unity with, that is, their ownership of, means of production such as land, animals, tools and other instruments of labour, so too was domestic labour born of this separation.

In contrast to functionalist or idealist notions about the historical existence of domestic labour, it's development is here considered to be part and parcel of fundamental changes in social production consequent upon the operation of objective economic laws. Given the level of development of the material forces of production associated with the transition from the feudal to the capitalist mode of production, the development of a system of generalised commodity production meant the simultaneous and inter-related development of <u>both</u> capitalist and domestic forms of production. To put it another way, domestic labour is as much a product of the transition from feudalism to capitalism as is wage-labour itself. Thus household labour is not some 'afterthought', not the result of some plan on the part of capital or men (or both), or the selection of just one of a variety of 'options' or alternatives for the social organisation of the reproduction of labour-power; rather, both capitalist and household forms of production were born of the material conditions determining social production at a definite stage in human history.

2. Theoretical Perspectives on the Historical Origin of Domestic Labour

I have argued that household production relations under capitalism are quite distinct, that domestic labour is a historically specific form of production whose material roots are embedded with those of the capitalist form of production in the soil of decaying feudalism. Once again this conclusion distinguishes my analysis from those associated with the Materialist Feminist approach to domestic labour. The historical corollary of the Materialist Feminist view that household production relations are patriarchal is the idea that 'domestic production' or 'women's production in the family' constitutes an independent, autonomous, sphere of production which has sustained patriarchy through the ages. Thus, Delphy speaks of the "family mode of production" as follows:

> "Historically and etymilogically the family is a unit of production... Since the family is based on the exploitation of one individual by those who are related to her by blood or by marriage, this exploitation exists wherever the unit of production is still the family." (Delphy 1980(a) p.6).

Maureen MacIntosh similarly concludes that domestic labour is a form of production common to all societies:

> "The institution of the household is a mediating link in societies. It mediates two sets of social

> relations, both of which have an economic content in the sense that they are based in production activities, and is itself an economic institution. The first set of relations is those which reproduce the subordination of women and the alienation from her of the content of her body, her progeny and the products of her domestic work. The second set of relations is those governing the performance of social labour other than domestic labour, relations which may be more or less oppressive and exploitative." (MacIntosh 1979 p.188).

This passage contains one of the keystones of Materialist Feminist and, indeed, Marxist Feminist theory, namely the juxtaposition of two autonomous sets of social relations of production in the history of human society, one set being class relations (the discovery and analysis of which can be safely left to the Marxists, or Marxism), the other being patriarchal relations whose material basis is domestic labour, or perhaps more broadly, a whole system of "the production of people" within the family (the analytic preserve of the Feminists, or Feminism).(3) In support of what can be termed this 'dual modes of production and reproduction model', it is common, and somewhat ironic, to find its proponents enlisting the aid of Engels. His famous passage from the preface to The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State is quoted in much of the literature:

> "According to the materialist conception, the determining factor in history is, in the final instance, the production and reproduction of immediate life. This, again, is of a twofold character: on the one side, the production of the means of existence, of food, or clothing and shelter and the tools necessary for that production; on the other side, the production of human beings themselves, the propagation of the species. The social organisation under which the people of a particular country live is determined by both kinds

> of production: by the stage of development of labour on the one hand and by the family on the other." (Engels 1972 pp.71-72).

My own interpretation of this passage is that by "the production of human beings themselves", Engels meant no more nor less than the process of biological reproduction (conception, gestation, childbirth) within historically changing kinship relations (or 'marriage relations'). Engels does not suggest here or elsewhere that this second kind of production involves either household labour, or the social construction of human (gendered) personality or psyche. Yet his formulation has been interpreted and 'developed' in just such a way in support of the dual model. To illustrate my point I shall refer to the work of Heidi Hartmann (1981), Wally Seccombe (1980(a)) and Mary Inman (1942).(4)

Hartmann says of the passage in Origin:

> "Engels and later Marxists failed to follow through on this dual project. The concept of production ought to encompass both the production of "things", or material needs, and the "production" of people, or more accurately the production of people who have particular attributes, such as gender. The Marxist development of the concept of production, however, has focused primarily on the production of things." (Hartmann 1981 p.317).

She elaborates upon this argument:

> "Household production also encompasses the biological reproduction of people and the shaping of their gender, as well as their maintenance through housework. In the labour process of producing and reproducing people, household production gives rise to another of the fundamental dynamics of our society. The system of production in which we live cannot be understood without reference to the production and reproduction both of commodities - whether in factories, service centres, or offices - and of people in households." (Hartmann 1981 p.373).

Here Engels' reference to the production of human beings themselves is correlated with "household production" which in turn encompasses housework, biological reproduction and the shaping of gender. Thus Hartmann allocates domestic labour to a second sphere of production associated with the 'production of people', the first comprising the production of 'things'.

Seccombe similarly places domestic labour in a second sphere of production which he terms "subsistence production" a sphere essentially concerned with the production of people:

> "Despite Engels' very promising formulation... Marxists have generally failed to analyse the specific way in which 'the production of immediate life... the production of human beings themselves' is socially established in different modes of production. Too often this dimension is left out, and the inevitable result is that the subsistence relations are permitted to collapse back into their own substrata." (Seccombe 1980(a) p.37).

For Seccombe, Marxism has been compromised by the fact that:

> "The 'two great classes of labour', the labour of material goods production and the labour of producing human life itself in socially definite forms, have been practically reduced to the former." (Seccombe 1980(a) p.29).

Thus:

> "This dualism of production-reproduction models has arisen in positive response to the arbitrary compression, within Marxism, of the conception of production - its reduction to material goods production."(Seccombe 1980(a) pp.33-34).

Mary Inman, writing in 1942, gave an earlier and very clear exposition of the 'two forms of production' position as drawn from Engels' statement. After quoting the familiar paragraph she explains:

> "On the one hand we have the production and reproduction of life. On the other we have the production of the means of existence. The first, the production and reproduction of life, takes place, in general, in the home, and involves the rearing of children and the renewal of the energy of adults through cooked food production, etc. The second, the production of the means of existence takes place in the fields and factories, in general, outside the home, and involves the making of clothes, shelter and necessary tools, and the growing of food etc." (Inman 1942 p.28).

The essential ideas contained in the various passages cited above can be summarised as follows:

i) The production of people, of life, constitutes a different form (type, sphere, mode) of production to that of the production of 'things' or 'material goods'.

ii) Domestic labour (household labour, housework) belongs in the former rather than in the latter sphere, or form, or production.

iii) Marxism has ignored the production of people, and correspondingly, has ignored domestic labour, and has focused exclusively on the production of 'things' or 'material goods'.

iv) Domestic labour is only one aspect of the 'production

of people' which also involves biological reproduction (Hartmann, Inman) and socialisation (Hartmann, Seccombe).

Thus, Hartmann, Seccombe and Inman all counterpose domestic labour to the "production of things", "material goods production" or the "production of the means of existence". Such a counterposition I believe to be entirely false, entirely at odds with Engels' formulations, and entirely alien to the materialist conception of history.

First, domestic labour is as much a form of material production as is capitalist commodity production, peasant production, serf production, petty commodity production, or anything else. Engels' reference to, "on the one side, the production of food, of clothing, of shelter and the tools necessary for that production" embraces all forms and types of human production irrespective of the social organisation of that production and its location ('inside' or 'outside' the home). As a formulation of universal significance it expresses the human condition: the necessity to labour to produce the material prerequisites of life. Household labour under capitalism is just one specific form of 'the production of food, of clothing, of shelter and the tools necessary for that production'. Whether the immediate product of household labour takes the form of a 'thing' - a material article (a cooked meal, a clean house, laundered linen) - or a labour service for the individual (bathing a child, caring for a sick spouse) is of no consequence. For Marx

and Engels the performance of a labour service is as much a part of the 'production' of the material prerequisities of life as the performance of labour which results in a tangible article independent of the individual. It is therefore incorrect in general to divide human production into two types - one concerned with the production of 'things' or 'material goods' and the other with the production of people. Domestic labour involves both the production of material articles and the performance of labour services directly for the individual; so does wage labour, peasant labour, slave labour, and so on.

Secondly, and this is only the other side of the coin, most, if not all human production is in the last instance production for the maintenance of life - the production of the means of subsistence - the 'production of people' (in the non-biological sense). The wage labourer producing a machine part for the textile industry may not appear to be engaged in the production of people, or even production <u>for</u> people, nevertheless, the system of generalised commodity production is merely a complex form of social organisation of the production of the means of subsistence, and thus of 'the production of people'. When the great bulk of society's means of subsistence are produced as commodities, when the products of labour are subject to the process of circulation, when the motivation for the production of means of subsistence is governed by the exigencies of capital accumulation, when the division of labour has finely fragmented social production and spatially divided 'the home' from 'the workplace', then

the fact that the whole system of production and circulation is ultimately concerned with the material prerequisities of life, and thus 'the production of people', becomes obscured. The 'dual modes' conception both reflects and perpetuates this obscurity and mystifies history when it is imposed onto pre-capitalist systems of production.

In fact, things appear more directly as they are in pre-capitalist society. Consider, for example, an independent peasant family owning a plot of land and other means of production, and engaged in both direct subsistence and petty commodity production. The individuals concerned would consider nonsensical the suggestion that their combined family labour could be separated into two distinct categories: that involving the production of 'things' or 'material articles', and that involving the production of themselves. At one level all their labour appears to be production for, and thus of, themselves. They may see distinctions along other lines: indoor as opposed to outdoor labour; labour resulting in a product for immediate family use as opposed to labour resulting in a product that is exchanged; or they may see labour tasks as differentiated by age and gender, but under such conditions, 'women's labour' would not correspond to what the industrial mind conceptualises as 'housework' or 'household labour', and certainly would not be conceptualised in terms of a distinction between the 'production of people' and the 'production of things'. In counterposing domestic labour and the production of people

to the production of 'material goods', or the 'means of existence', the Feminist approach uncritically imposes a conceptual distinction onto the history of social production which rests upon the forms of appearance peculiar to the capitalist epoch.

To conclude: the dual modes of production and reproduction model rests upon a false distinction between the production of 'things' (material goods, means of subsistence) and the 'production of people' (including domestic labour, biological reproduction and socialisation). Engels' formulations in The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State concerning the twofold character of the production and reproduction of immediate life have been misinterpreted. I have rejected the notion that domestic labour constitutes, or is part of, an autonomous sphere or mode of production whose locus is the family or the home, whose social relations are patriarchal, and whose historical existence can be chronicled alongside that of forms of material production within differing class relations. Instead I have concluded that domestic labour is a historically specific form of production - a product of historical development in general, and of the transition from feudalism to capitalism in particular. Domestic labour uniquely combines production for immediate use and production for exchange. This combination is the result of the commodity form of labour-power in the capitalist epoch and is therefore tied to the historical existence of the commodity labour-power.

But surely women have always been burdened with the cooking, cleaning and washing? How can domestic labour be historically specific? This way of posing the question is not so much wrong as one-sided. If one were to examine the history of the labour process, or of particular labour tasks one could of course see similarities across historical epochs. Similarly, it would be possible to identify 'male' and 'female' labour tasks which have persisted more or less throughout history. However, in a theoretical analysis of forms of production one is not concerned simply with the 'concrete, useful' characteristics of labour - the nature of the labour tasks themselves - but with the relations of production involved. The production relations characterising household production under capitalism are quite distinct. They emerged out of the process of destruction of both traditional subsistence and petty commodity production within the independent peasant or artisan household as the producers were separated from their means of production. The historical development of the capitalist mode of production was premised upon this separation, but in the process, a new and historically specific form of household production also developed; most of the labour tasks were not of course new, but the conditions in which they were performed were; their delineation from other labour tasks which for centuries had been performed in the home created a new type of collectivity, or entity, of concrete, useful labour tasks which today we know as 'housework and childcare'.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE DOMESTIC LABOUR DEBATE: A CRITIQUE

Retrospectively, the Domestic Labour Debate can be dated from the publication of Margaret Benston's article The Political Economy of Women's Liberation in 1969. At the time Benston broke new ground in asserting that the work done by the housewife in the home was a form of production, that in this production women stood in a definite relation to the means of production that differed from that of men, and that women's responsibility for this production constituted the economic basis of their subordination. As Malos has put it:

> "This was one step forward from the idea of the housewife as a totally passive 'consumer' which grew out of the analysis accepted by the women's movement up to this time that the nuclear family, and women located in their families as wives and mothers, were primarily, even solely, an ideological and psychological stabilising force in capitalist society. Margaret Benston, focusing on the economic function of the family, argued that in economic terms its primary function was not as a unit of consumption but that 'the family should be seen primarily as a production unit for housework and child-rearing'." (Malos 1980 p.11).

While Benston's article laid the foundation for a debate about the nature of household production which sustained a vitality for over a decade, it is not widely appreciated that an earlier debate covered some of the same theoretical ground. I refer to polemic between members of the Communist Party of the USA (USCP) in the

late 1930s and early 1940s.(1) In Mary Inman's thesis that the housewife is engaged in the production of the commodity labour-power (1940, 1942), and in Avram Landy's (1941, 1943) refutation of it (the latter advanced the USCP leadership's position), one can find prefigured several of the arguments about the use and applicability of Marx's economic categories in the analysis of household labour which are found in the recent Domestic Labour Debate. Thus, in the following critique of the Debate I shall also refer to arguments advanced by Inman and Landy.

It is necessary for my purposes to assume that the reader is familiar, at least in outline, with the main theoretical points at issue in the domestic labour literature. It is not my intention to provide either an introduction to, or a history of, the Debate, nor is it my intention to systematically discuss the merits of each contribution or the political and programmatic positions they have led to, for example, the 'Wages for Housework Campaign'. Several participants in the Debate, as well as some of its critics, have provided useful reviews of the literature.(2)

What I want to do in this chapter is select for critical examination some of the most important arguments concerning the political economy of domestic labour advanced in the Debate. In section one I discuss the arguments which have been made against the thesis that domestic labour is value creating (hereafter referred to as the 'value thesis' for convenience). Section two is a critique of the value theses advanced in the Debate to

date.

1. Arguments Against the Value Thesis

Use-value or value production?

I indicated in Chapter Two that one of the central questions in the Debate is whether domestic labour is a form of use-value production for immediate consumption, or a form of commodity, and hence value, production. Whereas I have concluded that domestic labour uniquely combines subsistence and commodity production (or production for immediate use and production for exchange) because labour-power takes on a commodity form, virtually all contributors to the Debate display an undialectical approach which insists that use-value production for subsistence and commodity production for exchange, are always, and under all conditions, mutually exclusive.(3) However, Wally Seccombe, writing six years after the publication of his original contribution to the Debate in which he had argued that domestic labour is value creating labour, recognised that this 'either-or' approach had been problematic:

> "A central argument of my initial New Left Review article on domestic labour was that domestic labour, while unproductive of surplus-value, did indeed create value; it was an integral and necessary labour input to the production of the commodity labour-power, which realised its full value upon sale. Although I do not find that argument wrong, per se, it tended to pose implicitly, a sterile either-or question - does, or does not, domestic labour create value? I had assumed that it did. My critics replied

> that it did not - being a labour of direct use - and in this way we dug conceptual antinomy, in which the domestic labour debate became stuck. To have a 'position' in this debate was often merely to line up on one or other side of this well-chewed bone of contention." (Seccombe 1980(b) p.222).

He goes on:

> "Is, then, domestic labour in the modern working class household a labour of direct use or a labour of exchange? It is both - in awkward combination. It is a labour for the direct use of household members. It is also a labour that is compelled to defend the exchange value of their labour-power on the market." (Seccombe 1980(b) p.223).

As indicated by Seccombe in the first of these passages, many post-1974 contributions to the Debate were attempts to refute his thesis that domestic labour is commodity producing, value creating labour.(4) Many of the arguments advanced against Seccombe's analysis are of course pertinent to <u>any</u> thesis that domestic labour creates value, including my own, and thus it is with the assessment of these and related arguments that I am primarily concerned in this section. However, it is always necessary to distinguish those elements of the critique which are relevant only to Seccombe's version of the value thesis from those with a wider application.(5) My own analysis of the commodity producing, value creating, nature of domestic labour coincides with Seccombe's only up to a point, in fact only so far as his point of departure:

> "When the housewife acts directly upon wage-purchased goods and necessarily alters their form, her labour becomes part of the congealed mass of past labour embodied in labour-power. The value she creates is realised as one part of the value labour-power achieves as a commodity when it is sold. All this is

> merely a consistent application of the labour theory of value to the reproduction of labour-power itself - namely that all labour produces value when it produces any part of a commodity that achieves equivalence in the market place with other commodities." (Seccombe 1975 p.9).

Beyond this point, Seccombe's analysis (1974, 1975) is full of errors and inconsistencies, for example, on the question of domestic labour and the law of value, on the question of domestic labour and unproductive labour, and in his equation of the quantity of value created by domestic labour with the quantity of labour required to reproduce the domestic labourer (see section two). These errors have been seized upon by Seccombe's critics as proof that not only his, but any value thesis, is untenable.

The immediate products of domestic labour

What arguments have been utilised against the value thesis? The first and most obvious objection arises from the fact that the immediate products of household labour are not themselves commodities:

> "Unlike both the capitalist and petty commodity modes of production the use-values produced in housework are not produced for exchange. They are consumed within the family rather than being sold on the market. Thus they do not take the form of commodities and housework is not commodity production." (Harrison 1973 p.38).

> "In the first place, while domestic labour, as Seccombe rightly says, is necessary labour - the working class housewife is no parasite - it nevertheless does not create value at all, because its immediate products are use-values and not commodities; they are not directed towards the

> market, but are for immediate consumption within the family." (Coulson et al 1975 p.62).

This argument relates back to Margaret Benston's original analysis (1969) in which domestic labour was identified as a form of use-value production. Benston's position in turn drew upon Ernest Mandel's statement in An Introduction to Marxist Economic Theory(6):

> "The second group of products in capitalist society which are not commodities but remain simple use-values consists of all things produced in the home. Despite the fact that considerable human labour goes into this type of household production, it still remains a production of use-values and not of commodities. Every time a soup is made or a button sewn on a garment, it constitutes production, but it is not production for the market." (Mandel 1967, quoted in Benston 1980 p.120).

It is of course irrefutable that the immediate products of the domestic labour process are not themselves commodities, but articles and services for immediate use. The value thesis does not stand or fall on this account. Indeed, many of its opponents would agree that the 'end' product of household labour is the commodity labour-power.(7) What is fundamentally in dispute is not the proposition that domestic labour produces labour-power, but whether in so doing it produces part of the value of that commodity. Most critics of the value thesis have attempted to disprove this by advancing differing versions of the argument that domestic labour involves only the production of use-values (for convenience I shall call this the 'use-value thesis'); it is argued that although domestic labour does contribute to the reproduction of

labour-power, or is 'necessary' for the reproduction of labour-power, or the living individual, nonetheless it remains solely use-value production, and is not commodity, and hence value, production.(8)

Commodity production and wage labour

In some versions of the use-value thesis the value creating capacity of domestic labour is denied on the grounds that the domestic labourer does not sell her/his own labour-power, is therefore not a wage-labourer, and thus cannot be engaged in commodity production.(9) Those who advance this argument erroneously identify commodity production in general with the specifically capitalist form of commodity production involving wage-labour; 'petty' or 'simple' commodity production, is left out of account. It is hardly necessary to point out that Marx always made absolutely clear the distinction between commodity production on the basis of individual private property in the means of production (petty, or simple, commodity production) and commodity production on the basis of private property in the form of capital. Indeed, the structure of Capital Volume One is such that the analysis of the commodity and money in Part One presupposes a community of 'commodity-owners' - individual, independent commodity producers employing no-one and using their own means of production.(10) One quotation should suffice on this point:

> "Both money and commodities are elementary preconditions of capital, but they develop into capital only under certain circumstances. Capital cannot come into being except on the foundation of the circulation of commodities (including money), i.e. where trade has already grown to a certain given degree. For their part, however, the production and circulation of commodities do not at all imply the existence of the capitalist mode of production. On the contrary, as I have already shown, they may be found even in 'pre-bourgeois modes of production'. They constitute the historical premises of the capitalist mode of production." (Marx 1976 pp.949-950).

Thus statements like the following by Adamson et al are ill-founded:(11)

> "In pre-capitalist collectivist societies the concrete labour of the woman in the household, just as that of a man hunting for food, was directly social in character. In capitalist society, however, the concrete labour of the individual man or woman becomes social in character only insofar as the product of labour acquires an exchange-value - only insofar as the man or woman produces value. To do this the individual must enter the labour market, sell his or her labour-power and produce commodities for the capitalist." (Adamson et al 1976 p.8: last sentence my emphasis)
>
> "Domestic work is privatised, individual toil. It is concrete labour which lies outside the capitalist production process and therefore cannot produce value or surplus-value." (Adamson et al 1976 p.8).

Similarly mistaken is Briskin's rigid identification of commodity production with capitalist production:

> "Unlike wage labour, domestic labour is not a commodity. The ability to labour, labour-power, becomes a commodity when it is exchanged for a wage. Precisely because it is unwaged, domestic labour cannot find its quantitative understanding in abstract and socially necessary time. And because only abstract labour can produce value, domestic labour cannot produce value." (Briskin 1980 p.159).

Once again, the value thesis is not disproved by

the argument that domestic labour is not commodity production within specifically capitalist, wage-labour relations. My value thesis rests, as does Seccombe's, on the proposition that domestic labour is a specific form of simple commodity production and as such excludes the wage-labour relation. As Paul Smith, a critic of the value thesis, correctly points out against arguments like those of Adamson et al:

> "If labour-power is seen as a commodity produced and then exchanged like any other product of simple commodity production, then most of the objections advanced against Seccombe are invalid." (Smith 1978 p.203).

Labour-power and the living individual

Another argument against the value thesis has been advanced by Susan Himmelweit and Simon Mohun (1977), Linda Briskin (1980), Adamson et al (1976), and Bradby (1982). It states that although domestic labour is vital for the reproduction of labour-power, it reproduces the living individual rather than the commodity labour-power (Himmelweit and Mohun, Adamson et al, Briskin), or reproduces the use-value of the commodity labour-power but not its value (Bradby). Thus:

> "Seccombe's mistake was to conflate the reproduction of labour-power with the reproduction of the living individual. Domestic labour is necessary in order that the labourer lives; but it does not produce the commodity labour-power, which is just an attribute of the living individual." (Himmelweit and Mohun 1977 p.23).

This line of argument makes a nonsense of Marx's definitions of the commodity labour-power and its value, definitions expressed most clearly in the following passages:

> "We mean by labour-power, or labour-capacity, the aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing in the physical form, the living personality, of a human being, capabilities which he sets in motion whenever he produces a use-value of any kind." (Marx 1976 p.270).

> "Labour-power exists only as a capacity of the living individual. Its production consequently presupposes his existence. Given the existence of the individual, the production of labour-power consists in the reproduction of himself, or his maintenance. For his maintenance he requires a certain quantity of means of subsistence. Therefore the labour-time necessary for the production of labour-power is the same as that necessary for the production of those means of subsistence; in other words, the value of labour-power is the value of the means of subsistence necessary for the maintenance of its owner." (Marx 1976 p.274: my emphasis).

Here Marx makes it clear that the reproduction of labour-power is nothing other than the reproduction of the living individual; the two are absolutely 'conflated'. The idea that the commodity labour-power can be distinguished from the living individual so that the products of one type of labour (wage-labour) can be said to reproduce the former while the products of another type, domestic labour, merely reproduce the latter, is an absurdity in Marxist economics. Similarly, insofar as a product of labour is a commodity, it is nonsensical to propose that the labour .hich is necessary for its production contributes to its use-value, but not its value; if labour contributes to the use-value of a commodity it also, by definition,

contributes to its value. The two aspects of the commodity cannot be conceptually torn apart; they stem from a form of labour which has a dual character. This spurious line of argument fails to convince. Once one has accepted the premise that domestic labour produces any aspect of labour-power then it follows ineluctably that domestic labour creates part of the value of the commodity labour-power.

The transfer of value

In Chapter Two I discussed the role of domestic labour in the transfer of value of the domestic means of production to the commodity labour-power (see section nine). This question has been largely ignored in the Debate and one can only speculate as to how the critics of the value thesis would explain the transfer to the commodity labour-power of the value of those wage goods which are not directly individually consumed, particularly those goods which serve as instruments of labour in the domestic labour process (cookers, vacuum cleaners, and so on). However, two contributors who do mention the transfer of value are Paul Smith and Bonnie Fox:

> "In terms of Marx's theory of value, domestic work has the property, along with other forms of concrete labour acting on commodities, of transferring value piecemeal by transforming the material bearers of a definite magnitude of value... Thus, domestic labour, by working on the means of subsistence in a useful way, transfers their value to the replenished labour-power but does not add to that value." (Smith 1978 p.211).

> "...the value of the worker's labour-power depends solely on the value of the necessary commodities that compose his means of subsistence, domestic labour creates no new value, but simply transfers the value of the commodities consumed to the worker's labour-power." (Fox 1980 p.187).

Both Smith and Fox try to reconcile the use-value thesis with the notion that domestic labour can transfer value but not create new value. As I hope to have adequately demonstrated in Chapter Two, there can be no such reconciliation; only commodity producing, value creating labour has the associated property of being an agency for the transfer of value. In Marxist political economy, the idea that a type of socially necessary labour can transfer value to a commodity but not, at the same time and in an indissoluble process, impart new value to that commodity, is a contradiction in terms. The capacity to transfer and create value are two sides of the same coin - they flow from the dual character of commodity producing labour (concrete and abstract labour). Thus I would argue that any close consideration of domestic labour and the transfer of value leads in the direction of support for the value thesis, not away from it.

Individual consumption

Several theorists have attempted to refute the value thesis with an argument based on the distinction between individual consumption and productive consumption. Adamson et al make this distinction as follows:

> "There is firstly the productive consumption of the worker's labour-power by the capitalist who bought it for the purpose of producing products of a higher value than that of the capital advanced. Secondly, there is the individual consumption of the worker in replenishing what previously the capitalist had consumed - his labour-power... The individual consumption of the worker's means of subsistence requires the expenditure of labour-time on cooking, cleaning, child-care and so on." (Adamson et al 1976 p.8).

In his critique of Mary Inman's early version of the value thesis, Landy gives the following definitions of productive and individual consumption:

> "The basis of her confusion is her refusal to recognise the distinction between individual consumption and productive consumption, the consumption that takes place in the home and the consumption that takes place in industry." (Landy 1943 p.24).

The argument runs as follows: only in the process of productive consumption are commodities, and hence values, produced; in capitalist society productive consumption takes place exclusively within the capitalist production process (i.e. within wage relations); hence domestic labour, being labour in the home outside capitalist wage relations, does not involve productive consumption, and thus does not produce commodities nor create value; domestic labour belongs to the category of 'individual consumption'.(12) That domestic labour is a 'labour of individual consumption' has also been argued by others,(13) for example:

> "Domestic labour transforms commodities to make them usable without transferring value or adding new value, and, as such, is the form of the individual

> consumption of the working class." (Briskin 1980 p.153).

In support of this position, reference is often made to those passages in Capital Volume One in which Marx discusses the worker's individual consumption (these passages are given in full in Chapter Two), particularly the following:

> "The worker's consumption is of two kinds. While producing he consumes the means of production with his labour, and converts them into products with a higher value than that of the capital advanced. This is his productive consumption. It is at the same time consumption of the labour-power by the capitalist who has bought it. On the other hand the worker uses the money paid to him for his labour-power to buy the means of subsistence; this is his individual consumption. The worker's productive consumption and his individual consumption are quite distinct. In the former he acts as the motive power of capital, and belongs to the capitalist. In the latter, he belongs to himself, and performs his necessary vital functions outside the production process." (Marx 1976 p.717).

The first point to be made in reply to this argument is that it rests upon a confused understanding of the meaning of the concepts 'productive consumption' and 'individual consumption' in Marxist economics. This in turn leads to the false subsumption of domestic labour under the category individual consumption, and thus to a baseless refutation of the value thesis. In section three of Chapter Two I attempted to demonstrate that individual consumption is the antithesis of the creation of products in a labour process. The application of these categories to the domestic labour process involves the recognition that household labour constitutes a production process in

which most wage goods serve as means of production which are productively consumed. It is the end products of the domestic labour process, forming the majority of the finished means of subsistence, which are individually consumed. Once this is understood, the conception shared by Adamson et al, Landy, and others, that domestic labour is a 'labour of individual consumption', or belongs to the category 'individual consumption', is seen to be completely contradictory precisely because this category excludes labour. Domestic labour entails the productive consumption of means of production and is therefore the antithesis of individual consumption; the same is true of any form of direct subsistence production.

Despite this, Adamson et al might protest as follows: when it comes to the analysis of the specifically capitalist form of production, Marx reserves the concept 'productive consumption' strictly for the capitalist labour process; the reproduction of labour-power is referred to as the worker's individual consumption:

> "...the worker uses the money paid to him for his labour-power to buy the means of subsistence; this is his individual consumption." (Marx 1976 p.717).

Surely this justifies the identification of domestic labour with individual consumption under the capitalist mode of production? It is certainly the case that insofar as Marx deals exclusively with the analysis of capitalist production relations, productive consumption is only seen to occur within the capitalist production process. However, this is hardly surprising since Marx's method in

this connection is to make conceptual abstraction from all non-capitalist forms of production so that all material production is conceived as taking place within the capitalist mode of production which is thereby conceived in a 'pure' form. By abstracting from domestic labour, the consumption of finished means of subsistence on the part of the working class will by definition be conceived as involving only individual consumption 'outside the process of production'. It is their failure to understand this method as applied in Capital, and thus the assumptions which informed Marx's use of concepts like productive and individual consumption, that leads Adamson et al, Landy, and the others, to falsely subsume domestic labour under individual consumption. Instead of taking Marx's abstract schema of the reproduction of the working class as the starting point for the conretisation of the analysis, these theorists attempt to resolve the theoretical problems presented by domestic labour by asserting that Marx had already accounted for it in the notion of the 'worker's individual consumption'.

To summarise: the argument that domestic labour is not value producing labour because it does not involve the process of productive consumption is an incorrect one. It rests upon two inter-related errors - the misunderstanding of the distinction between productive and individual consumption, and the failure to understand Marx's method in Capital. In the same way that commodity production cannot be said to take place exclusively within specifically capitalist production relations, so too, it

cannot be said that productive consumption is exclusive to the capitalist production process.

'Abstract' labour

A number of critics of the value thesis have denied the commodity producing, value creating, character of domestic labour on the grounds that it cannot become 'abstract labour', and thus remains 'concrete', 'privatised' labour, 'outside social production' (see for example, Coulson et al 1975, Smith 1978, Adamson et al 1976, Fox 1980, Molyneux 1979). Paul Smith, in one of the best contributions to the debate, poses the problem as follows:

> "If domestic labour contributes to the production of a commodity then it would seem that, like any other commodity-producing labour, it too is reduced to abstract labour and so is value-creating, and constitutes a branch of social production. The problem for Marxists is not dogmatically to assert that this is not the case but to show why it cannot be the case: to show why this particular concrete, private and individual labour cannot manifest itself as its opposite, as abstract, social and socially necessary labour, and hence why it must be seen as simply a concrete labour producing use-values for immediate consumption." (Smith 1978 pp.203-204).

Smith's call for an analysis free from 'dogmatic assertion' is evidence of the fact that several contributors to the debate have been content to merely assert that domestic labour cannot become abstract labour and is not, therefore, commodity production. For example, Coulson et al state the following:

> "Under capitalism, the market is the only mediator that allows different concrete labours, through the sale and exchange of commodities they produce, to reach their equivalence and therefore become abstract social labour. The social conditions under which housework is performed prevent any such relation being formed, so that the conditions of the housewife's social labour cannot be abstracted from as Seccombe would argue." (Coulson et al 1975 p.63).

Why "...the social conditions under which housework is performed" prevents household labour, alongside all other types of labour embodied in the commodity labour-power, from being reduced to a definite quantity of 'abstract' or average social labour when this commodity is exchanged in the market, is not explained by Coulson et al. There might be some point to their assertion if they argued that domestic labour does not produce the commodity labour-power in any sense and hence does not produce a product exchanged in the market. However, they also state that, "...it is true that, as Seccombe brings out well, the working class housewife contributes to the production of a commodity - labour-power..." (Coulson et al 1975 p.62).

It is necessary to turn to Smith's own contribution for more coherent arguments designed to show why domestic labour cannot become abstract labour, and hence cannot be considered a form of simple commodity production. First, however, it should be pointed out that Smith quite correctly dismisses the argument advanced by some of Seccombe's critics to the effect that domestic labour cannot become abstract labour because, unlike capitalist commodity production, it is 'private' rather than 'social' labour. In relation to both simple and capitalist commodity production Smith explains:

> "...all commodity production is private, individual and concrete labour which through exchange manifests itself as social, socially necessary, and abstract labour: 'labour products would not become commodities if they weren't products of private labour which are produced independently of one another and stand on their own.(Marx)'." (Smith 1978 p.119).

He goes on to say, however:

> "It will be shown that it is not because domestic labour is private labour that it cannot become abstract but, on the contrary, it is because it cannot become abstract labour that it remains private." (Smith 1978 p.203).

On what basis does Smith make the latter claim? He advances three inter-related arguments:

> "The first reason that domestic labour cannot be subsumed under commodity production is a consequence of the fact that in a commodity economy labour is allocated between branches of production by the law of value, and equilibrium between branches consists in their products exchanging at value..." (Smith 1978 pp.204-205).

The second argument runs as follows:

> "While the commodity labour-power can be seen as the product of domestic labour, it cannot be said that the commodity form of the product impinges on the domestic labour process, that its character as value is taken into account - this is clear from the fact that domestic labour does not cease to be performed when there is relative overproduction of its particular product. Without this indifference to the particular concrete form of labour, the domestic labourer does not assume the economic character of a commodity producer. Consequently, domestic labour cannot be seen as abstract labour, the substance of value." (Smith 1978 p.206).

The third argument relates very closely to the first. Quoting Marx to the effect that:

> "Indifference towards specific labours corresponds to a form of society in which individuals can with ease

> transfer from one labour to another, and where the specific kind is a matter of chance for them, hence of indifference." (Marx 1973 p.104),

Smith suggests that domestic labour cannot become abstract labour because unlike other concrete labours it is not the subject of such social 'indifference' and 'transferability':

> "It is precisely because the capitalist mode of production leaves the 'maintenance and reproduction of the working class... to the labourer's instincts of self-preservation and of propagation' (Marx 1974 p.537), and that this falls in particular to the female section of the proletariat, that domestic labour does not become equal with other concrete labours and so is not expressed as abstract labour." (Smith 1978 p.207).

I shall deal with the substance of these arguments, all of which relate to the relationship between domestic labour and the law of value, in the next subsection. Here I want to concentrate upon Smith's formalistic method of approach. Criteria such as transferability, indifference to form, and conscious, purposeful commodity production, are derived from Marx's analysis of the developed capitalist mode of production and are then used to judge and assess a specifically non-capitalist form of simple commodity production. Not surprisingly, the production of the commodity labour-power by the domestic labourer fails to meet the criteria laid down in this fashion.

Even if one accepts the substance of Smith's criteria, it would only prove what is already know, namely that domestic labour is not capitalist commodity

production; it does not disprove the value thesis per se. Why does Smith, despite his acceptance of the distinction between the simple form of commodity production and the capitalist form, approach domestic labour in this way? The answer lies in his conception of the place occupied by simple commodity production in Marx's political economy. This in turn relates to Smith's explicit reliance on I.I. Rubin's work Essays on Marx's Theory of Value (1982). For Rubin, the transition in Capital from the analysis of simple commodity production to capitalist commodity production is only an expression of Marx's conceptual method and not, simultaneously, the expression in theory of the process of historical development of commodity production:

> "Marx emphasises that the method of moving from abstract to concrete concepts is only a method by which thought grasps the concrete, and not the way the concrete phenomenon actually happened. This means that the transition from labour-value or simple commodity economy to production price of the capitalist economy is a method for grasping the concrete, i.e. the capitalist economy. This is a theoretical abstraction and not a picture of the historical transition from simple commodity economy to capitalist economy." (Rubin 1982 p.255).

It follows from this that concepts associated with commodity production proper - 'abstract labour', 'the law of value', and so forth - only have historical validity within the capitalist mode of production, and that within the latter 'concrete' reality, commodity production must share all the attributes of its developed capitalist form. In adopting such a position Rubin, and hence Smith, explicitly reject Engels' view that commodity production

and the law of value exist prior to the capitalist mode of production. Basing his arguments upon Marx's statements regarding this question (and upon an intimate personal knowledge of Marx's thought), Engels states the following:

> "It should go without saying that where things and their mutual relations are conceived not as fixed but rather as changing, their mental images, too, i.e. concepts, are also subject to change and re-formulation; that they are not to be encapsulated in rigid definitions, but rather developed in their process of historical or logical formation. It will be clear, then, why at the beginning of Volume 1, where Marx takes simple commodity production as his historical presupposition, only later, proceeding from this basis, to come on to capital - why he proceeds precisely there from the simple commodity and not from a conceptually and historically secondary form, the commodity as already modified by capitalism." (Engels 1981 p.103).

> "To sum up. Marx's law of value applies universally, as much as any economic laws do apply, for the entire period of simple commodity production, i.e. up to the time at which this undergoes a modification by the onset of the capitalist form of production." (Engels 1981 p.1037).

On these matters I am in complete agreement with Engels.(14) This means that my approach to the analysis of domestic labour is not hampered by the formalism characteristic of Smith's contribution to the Debate. What has to be demonstrated is not that domestic labour shares all the (secondary) characteristics of developed capitalist commodity production, but that it shares the fundamental characteristics of commodity production in its simplest form. The key question is: does domestic labour confront other forms of concrete labour through the exchange of its product. The answer is yes; through the sale of the commodity labour-power, all the concrete

labours embodied within it (necessary to reproduce it) are confronted by, and equated with, the other concrete labours of society expressed in the form of the universal equivalent - the money commodity. In this process of equation, these concrete labours are reduced to a definite quantity of socially average labour - the total labour of society considered in abstraction from its socially useful characteristics. Domestic labour becomes abstract labour insofar as it is equated with the totality of social labour through the exchange of the commodity labour-power. There are no other criteria which any particular type of concrete labour has to meet, other than the exchange of its product, before it can be judged value creating, commodity producing labour. Having said this, however, the task is to analyse the particular social form of commodity production represented by domestic labour; this I attempted to do in Chapter Two.

The law of value

Finally, it remains to discuss the argument that domestic labour cannot be value creating labour because it lies beyond the influence of, or is not directly governed by, the law of value (Smith 1978, Coulson et al 1975, Gardiner 1975, Himmelweit and Mohun 1977, Molyneux 1979, Adamson et al 1976). Put simply this argument rests upon the fact that commodity producing labour is redistributed within and between branches of production under the regulating influence of the law of value, expressing

itself through competition. Overproduction (or its opposite) in one branch of commodity production will result in the redistribution of labour-power and means of production such that overall equilibrium is maintained. Within branches of production, competition between commodity producers ensures that the labour-time embodied in commodities constantly tends towards the average, socially necessary labour-time. The argument against the value thesis suggests that domestic labour cannot be commodity producing, value creating labour because it is not regulated in this fashion. As I have noted, Smith and others have stated that the commodity labour-power continues to be produced irrespective of market requirements (i.e. is systematically over-produced), that there is not the same 'mobility' of labour-power between the domestic production process and other branches of production: "...women do not, in any straightforward sense, have the option of moving to another occupation. Women are tied through marriage to housework and housework is therefore not comparable to other occupations." (Gardiner 1975 p.49), that there is no mechanism for the regulation of the domestic labour process such that domestic labour-time tends towards 'socially necessary' labour-time.

There are two ways of responding to these arguments. One is to establish that the performance of domestic labour within individual households <u>is</u> regulated by the operation of the law of value in certain crucial respects. In one of his more recent articles, Seccombe has

adopted this approach and advanced some convincing arguments:(15)

> "Individual households must accept the verdict of the labour market against their labour-power and adjust their resources and labour-time accordingly, in order to defend and enhance its exchange-value. Through this proletarian compulsion, the law of value shapes domestic labour in individual working class households, influencing, in a sluggish fashion, its intensity, its duration and its composite tasks." (Seccombe 1980(b) p.220).

The second response is to challenge the way in which the argument is posed - especially the conceptualisation of 'the law of value' upon which it is based. It is this latter course I wish to follow here.

In its simplest form the law of value states that commodities are exchanged on the basis of the quantity of average social labour necessary for their production rather than by any other criteria (utility, scarcity, and so forth). It is the most fundamental law established by the Marxist labour theory of value. The redistribution of labour-power and means of production between different branches of production, and within branches of production, is the <u>consequence</u> of the operation of the law of value; this redistributive effect is not the essence, but the product of the operationalisation of this law. This distinction is important and one that all those who have considered the impact of the law of value on domestic labour have failed to make (whether they support or oppose the value thesis). The result is that the question of the <u>immediate</u> impact of the law of value on the quantity of value created by

domestic labour is ignored in the debate; the protagonists have concentrated solely upon the question of the redistributive, regulating influence of the operation of the law. In Chapter Two I examined in some detail the direct impact of the law of value on the quantity of value created by domestic labour. I argued that because domestic labour is labour of a, relatively, much lower productivity and intensity than average commodity producing labour (i.e. labour within the capitalist production process), there is a great disparity between the quantity of value produced in equivalent temporal periods within the domestic and capitalist spheres of production. The consequence of this is that relatively small quantities of social value are created by domestic labour. In any discussion of the impact of the law of value on domestic labour the outcome of the exchange between concrete labours of differing productivities and intensities should be the first consideration. By confusing or conflating the impact of the law of value with the regulative consequences of its operation, the opponents of the value thesis fail to give full consideration to the relationship between the law of value and household labour; the proposition that domestic labour is value creating is rejected on the basis of a partial, and therefore faulty, analysis.

It is possible, of course, that the opponents of the value thesis may accept much of what is said above concerning the distinction between the essence and consequences of the law of value and it operation, but

still maintain that because domestic labour is not fully regulated by the law's operation, it therefore cannot be value creating labour. However, this conclusion would also be incorrect. Disproving the value creating, commodity producing character of any particular form of production cannot be done simply on the basis of considerations of its regulation by the operation of the law of value. First of all, as Marx made clear, these regulative powers do not work in a mechanical and unfailing manner:

> "It is true that the different spheres of production constantly tend towards equilibrium, for the following reason. On the one hand, every producer of a commodity is obliged to produce a use-value, i.e. he must satisfy a particular social need... on the other hand, the law of value of commodities ultimately determines how much of its disposable labour-time society can expend on each kind of commodity. But this constant tendency on the part of various spheres of production towards equilibrium comes into play only as a reaction against the constant upsetting of this equilibrium." (Marx 1976 p.476).

Secondly, the law of value never actually operates in 'pure form'; it is constantly circumscribed and inhibited by real circumstances pertaining to the production of commodities which may lead to the partial negation of its operative powers under certain conditions. Thus the question that needs to be posed is not whether the value thesis can be disproven or proven on the basis of the redistributive powers of the operation of the law of value, but rather why it is that domestic labour as a particular form of commodity producing labour is not regulated <u>in the same way</u> as other branches of commodity production. The answer is undoubtedly to be discovered in

the peculiarities of the commodity being produced - the commodity labour-power. For example, it can be argued that Smith's point that the commodity labour-power does not cease to be produced under conditions of overproduction (unemployment, or, more accurately, what Marx termed the question of the 'reserve army of labour') does not disprove the value thesis at all; it merely demonstrates that in opposition to the operation of the law of value, the working class has won the right to obtain domestic means of production with which to produce means of subsistence necessary for its reproduction. This partial negation of the operation of the law of value is a consequence of the peculiarity of the commodity labour-power, that this commodity is inseparable from the living individual him/herself. To put it another way, because the domestic form of production is a unique combination of subsistence and commodity production, the operation of the law of value will always come up against and be distorted and inhibited by the subsistence aspect of domestic labour. The important thing is to attempt the analysis of this complex interaction, and not to recoil from it back towards the use-value thesis.

2. Seccombe's Value Thesis: A Critique

As the foregoing discussion clearly demonstrates, most contributors to the Domestic Labour

Debate reject the view that household labour is commodity producing and hence value creating labour. The majority position is that domestic labour, while necessary for the reproduction of labour-power, involves only the production of use-values for subsistence. This consensus was reached largely in response to Seccombe's version of the value thesis. Although, as I have noted, a small number of other contributors have advanced value theses, Seccombe's remains by far the most developed.(16) The shortcomings of Seccombe's analysis are the main subject of this section.

I indicated earlier that Seccombe's point of departure or premise was a correct one:

> "When the housewife acts directly upon wage-purchased goods and necessarily alters their form, her labour becomes part of the congealed mass of past labour embodied in labour-power. The value she creates is realised as one part of the value labour-power achieves as a commodity when it is sold." (Seccombe 1974 p.9).

However, he goes on to argue that the quantity of value created by domestic labour is equivalent to the quantity of value required to reproduce the labour-power of the domestic labourer:(17)

> "To illustrate: let the wage be divided into two parts. Part A to sustain the wage labourer (or his substitutes) while part B sustains the domestic labourer (and her substitutes). The value of B is equivalent to the value domestic labour creates... Here is the criteria for establishing domestic labour's value: it creates value equivalent to the 'production costs' of its own maintenance - namely part B of the wage." (Seccombe 1974 p.10).

Seccombe attempts to justify this position on the grounds that domestic labour conforms to the category

'unproductive labour' as used by Marx in Theories of Surplus-Value:

> "Domestic labour... its relation with capital is not direct (i.e. it is not a wage labour) and secondly, it does not create more value than it itself possesses. Domestic labour is unproductive (in the economic sense) and conforms with Marx's description of an unproductive labour 'exchanged not with capital but with revenue, that is wages or profits'." (Seccombe 1974 p.11).

On both accounts - that the value created by domestic labour is equivalent to the value required to reproduce the labour-power of the domestic labourer, and that domestic labour is unproductive labour - Seccombe's analysis is erroneous. First, as Marx made clear, the amount of new value created in any production process is entirely independent of, and hence quantitatively unrelated to, the amount of value embodied in those commodities necessary to reproduce the labour-power of the producer. Several of Seccombe's critics have correctly highlighted this error, for example, Bruce Curtis:

> "...if Seccombe contends that domestic labour creates an amount of value equivalent to that which the housewife consumes, then value ceases to be a product of objectified labour-time. In other words, if we take two housewives working under identical technical conditions for identical periods, they will produce different amounts of value depending upon upon how much of the wage they consume. In contradiction to the labour theory of value, which suggests that workers working for equal periods under identical technical conditions will produce equal amounts of value if they are paid different amounts of money. In short it is not possible to maintain that domestic labour creates value through the mechanism suggested by Seccombe." (Curtis 1980 p.119).

Secondly, Seccombe's characterisation of domestic labour as unproductive labour is incorrect because the categories productive and unproductive labour as defined in Capital have no relevance in relation to the simple commodity form of production. Whether domestic labour is productive or unproductive labour is a question which has has received considerable attention in the Debate. This, of course, relates to a wider discourse on these categories in Marxist political economy (see, for example, Mandel 1978, Howell 1975). However, in the context of the Domestic Labour Debate the issue is something of a red herring; Marx's use of these categories in Capital relate solely to wage-labour:(18)

> "The distinction between productive and unproductive labour depends merely on whether labour is exchanged for money as money or for money as capital. For instance, if I buy produce from a self-employing worker, artisan, etc., the category does not enter into the discussion because there is no direct exchange between money and labour, but only between money and produce." (Marx 1976 p.1047).

On the occasion that Marx examines the labour process in general, abstracting from particular social forms, then all human labour involved in the production of use-values is regarded as 'productive' in this completely different sense:

> "If we look at the whole process from the point of view of its result, the product, it is plain that both the instruments and the object are means of production and that the labour itself is productive labour." (Marx 1976 p.287).

But as Marx indicates in a footnote to this passage:

> "This method of determining what is productive labour, from the standpoint of the simple labour process is by no means sufficient to cover the capitalist process of production." (Marx 1976 p.287).

The method of determining what is productive or unproductive labour for capital is found elsewhere in Capital and Theories of Surplus Value. Fundamentally, the definition of these categories is derived from specifically capitalist social relations of production and not from any inherent properties of wage labour or its product:

> "These definitions are therefore not derived from the material characteristics of labour (neither from the nature of its product nor from the particular character of the labour as concrete labour) but from the definite social form, the social relations of production within which the labour is realised." (Marx 1969 pp.157-197).

It is not relevant to pursue this here. It is sufficient to point out that, in opposition to Seccombe's formulation, domestic labour, as a form of simple commodity production and subsistence production combined, is neither productive nor unproductive labour in the sense invested in these categories by Marx.

The reason why Seccombe advances the argument that the domestic labourer produces the same quantity of value as is embodied in the her/his means of subsistence is his a priori desire to achieve a balanced value equation:

> "Where Marx subsumes the entire family's subsistence in the wage, I have broken it down, pitting the housewife's contribution to the reproduction of

> labour-power sold to capital against the costs of her own subsistence. She creates value, embodied in labour-power sold to capital, equal to the value she consumes in her own upkeep. Note that the equation balances as before - value is neither created nor destroyed overall, but merely transferred." (Seccombe 1975 p.89).

This concern to balance the equation - "value is neither created nor destroyed overall" - is directly connected to his methodological approach, namely his attempt to 'fit' domestic labour directly into Marx's schema of the reproduction of labour-power:

> "I maintained in my first article that Marx 'laid out a framework within which domestic labour clearly fits'. I was attempting to fill in that gap which he left in the reproduction cycle of labour-power where wage goods are converted into renewed labour-power inside the family unit. If any analysis (that domestic labour creates value) 'fits' it should be expected not to upset the overall equilibrium of this value cycle as it passes through the household." (Seccombe 1975 p.89).

This approach is in contradiction to Marx's method in Capital. Marx's schema of the reproduction of the commodity labour-power operates at a level of abstraction which excludes domestic labour from immediate theoretical consideration. The task, as I explained in some detail in Chapter Two, is not to 'fit' domestic labour into this schema directly, but to concretise Marx's analysis in a systematic and consistent manner. By introducing domestic labour as value creating labour into the schema, the value equation is inevitably thrown out of equilibrium. In adding new value to the means of consumption purchased with the wage, there results a tendency for the value of labour-power to rise (if the value of labour-power remains

unchanged in all other respects). Some of Seccombe's critics have pointed out that the value thesis poses the question of a rising value of labour-power. However, in establishing this they usually assume that Seccombe's conclusion should be that labour-power is sold below its true value:

> "The contention that the housewife creates value by adding her labour to the commodities purchased with the wage implies that labour-power contains more value than the wage. If domestic labour creates value, then labour-power contains the value embodied in the wage plus the value created by domestic labour. Labour-power and the wage cease to be equivalents and the capitalist class would profit simply by buying labour-power." (Curtis 1980 p.118).

> "Far from being a mere application of Marx's theory of value, as Seccombe claims, this represents a serious challenge to it in that it suggests one commodity, labour-power, is always sold below its value, since this would be equivalent to the value of the means of subsistence bought with the wage plus the value said to be created by the domestic labourer." (Smith 1978 p.202).

In counterposition, my value thesis is premised on the analytic assumption that labour-power always exchanges at its value - that the additional value created by domestic labour is realised in the exchange of the commodity labour-power - hence the tendency for the value of labour-power to rise.(19) However, this tendency is only one of several, predominantly countervailing, tendencies operating upon the value and the price of labour-power. Overall, the tendency for the value of labour-power to rise as a result of the value created by domestic labour is negated by stronger, opposing tendencies. Further, this tendency is weak because only

small quantities of value are created in long periods of domestic labour-time. Such is the conclusion I reached through the examination of the differing levels of labour productivity and intensity in the domestic and capitalist spheres of production. The failure of Seccombe and other contributors to the Debate to make such an examination has led some theorists to reject the value thesis on the grounds that it appears to posit the creation of enormous quantities of value in the domestic labour process. For example, Gerstein states:

> "How much value would be created by domestic work if it were value-creating labour? The crucial observation here is the well-known fact that the time spent by the wife on necessary activities such as cleaning, cooking, caring for children and other household tasks is even longer than the average worker's working day... Were all of this domestic labour to contribute to the value of labour-power... then [it]... would be the sum of the time spent on domestic work, the time spent by wage labourers who service labour-power, and the value of all the material commodities consumed. But the time spent in domestic labour alone is already greater than the time spent by the wage-worker in his working day, so the value of labour-power would be greater than the value produced by the wage-labourer in his working day. We know this is wrong. The value of labour-power, in fact, is less than the value the worker creates when this labour-power is consumed for an entire working day - the difference is precisely the surplus-value appropriated by the capitalist. The conclusion is that domestic labour does not contribute to the value of labour-power..." (Gerstein 1973 p.117).

Here, Gerstein makes the mistake of equating the quantity of value created with actual labour-time rather than with socially necessary, or socially average, labour-time. Like all commodity producing labours, domestic labour is reduced, through the exchange of its product, to

definite quantities of socially average commodity producing labour, to abstract human labour. Because the productivity and intensity of domestic labour is considerably below that of labour within capitalist wage labour relations, in exchange, only a fraction of actual domestic labour will count as socially necessary labour, and thus only relatively small quantities of value will be created.

In conclusion, it is clear that Seccombe's version of the value thesis is not a convincing one. In the absence of alternative value theses of any sophistication, contributors to the Debate have found fault with Seccombe's analysis, recoiled from the value thesis, and in a sense gone for what appears to be the safe option - the argument that domestic labour is simply a form of use-value production, nothing more and nothing less. Others, despite rejecting Seccombe's analysis, have not entirely dismissed the possibility of a viable value thesis:

> "In short, it is not possible to maintain that domestic labour creates value through the mechanism suggested by Seccombe. No one else to date has specified a mechanism in place of this to support the position that domestic labour creates value. Unless this can be done at the level of theory, there are no grounds for arguing that domestic labour creates value." (Curtis 1980 p.119).
>
> "The possibility that domestic labour <u>does</u> contribute to the value of labour-power has not been finally dismissed, despite the consensuses which have evolved out of the Domestic Labour Debate." (Close 1985 p.45).

I can only hope that my own analysis goes some way towards

realising this possibility.

PART TWO

STUDIES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF DOMESTIC LABOUR

INTRODUCTION

The three chapters in Part Two deal with the historical development of household labour, but do not constitute a comprehensive history of the development of domestic labour in the capitalist epoch. Such a history remains to be written. Rather, each chapter is a discrete study of particular aspects of this development which are of importance, and which I find of special interest.

Having examined the form of production represented by capitalist household labour in Part One, I am here concerned with questions about the actual, or concrete, development of domestic labour in connection with the evolution of the capitalist mode of production. The studies are based upon the British experience although in Chapter Six I draw upon information pertaining to other advanced capitalist nations.

Although each of the following chapters is a separate study in which different issues are examined in relation to different historical periods, each is based upon a conceptualisation of the domestic labour-process which can be summarised as follows:

i) Like any other labour-process, the domestic labour-process requires both means of production and the expenditure of living labour-power. These are the two basic elements of the production process.

ii) At any stage in capitalist history, the means of production for household labour are acquired, in the main, through the exchange of wages for commodities produced within capitalist production relations. At any stage in capitalist history, the expenditure of labour-power in unpaid domestic labour will depend to an important extent on the degree to which capitalist production consumes (quantitatively and qualitatively) the labour-power of the working class.

Looking in more detail at these two elements of the domestic labour-process, it is clear that,

a) the means of production available for household labour at any stage will depend on i) the nature of the use-values produced within the capitalist sphere; this depends on the level of development of capitalist industry and the diversity and scale of production, and ii) the size of the wage relative to the prices of domestic means of production

b) the expenditure of labour-power in household production will depend on i) the amount of time available to the working class for labour for direct subsistence, ii) the amount of physical energy (the capacity to labour) reserved for production in the home, iii) the objective demand (quantitative and qualitative) for the immediate products of domestic labour (the domestic work-load - mainly determined by factors such as family size and

composition, social criteria of what is required and so on) and iv) subjective factors.

Chapter Five looks at the domestic labour-process in 19th century Britain. In particular, I focus on the second element of the production process - the expenditure of labour-power - and examine this in the context of early industrial and pre-imperialist capitalist development. This lays the basis for a discussion about the relationship between class struggle and two interrelated developments: a considerable increase in the amount of time spent in household labour as the 19th century progresses, and the solidifying of the sexual division of labour within the working class family signified by the development of full-time housewifery. In the final section of the chapter I attempt to show how this historical analysis links together with the value thesis - how the theoretical analysis of the political economy of domestic labour and the historical analysis are mutually enriching.

In Chapter Six I focus on the first element of the domestic labour-process, the means of production. The study is of the development of the domestic means of production in the 20th century. More specifically, it is a study relating to a body of literature concerning the relationship between household technology and domestic labour-time. This in turn informs a discussion about the factors underlying the increasing participation of married women in the labour force in many advanced capitalist

economies in the second half of this century.

Chapter Seven deals with the domestic labour-process in a particular period in British history, the inter-war years. This provides the opportunity to study household labour, and the social position of the housewife, in some detail. I chose the inter-war years for such a micro-historical study for several reasons which are outlined in the introduction to that chapter. In particular, it was the period in which full-time housewifery reached its zenith, for working class women that is, in Britain.

CHAPTER FIVE

CLASS STRUGGLE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF DOMESTIC LABOUR IN NINETEENTH CENTURY BRITIAN

In Chapter One I characterised the Materialist Feminist theoretical approach to the study of domestic labour as functionalist and idealist. The approach adopted by most of the contributors to the Domestic Labour Debate was similarly characterised. The problem with both approaches is that the existence and development of domestic labour is conceived as the manifestation of the 'interests' of 'men', 'capital' or the 'capitalist class'. In counterposition, I have argued that forms of production owe their existence to objective forces, most fundamentally, the level of development of the material forces of production. I concluded that domestic labour emerged from the transition between feudalism and capitalism as an objectively necessary form of production. The early development of the system of generalised commodity production did not and could not secure conditions for the adequate reproduction of the working class on the basis of wage labour alone. The additional expenditure of labour-power outside wage labour relations was necessary by and for the working class for its own subsistence. The fact that this direct subsistence production was at the same time the production of the commodity labour-power is what gives household labour

under capitalism its unique character.

To say that domestic labour owes its existence to objective forces does not, however, preclude recognition and consideration of the part played by subjective forces in real historical development. It is precisely the role played by working class struggle in the consolidation of the proletarian domestic sphere in the course of the 19th century which is the central issue in this chapter.

While it is quite correct to say that domestic labour was an objective requirement developing out of the economic transformation which gave rise to capitalist production, it would be incorrect to suppose that therefore domestic labour's development was inevitable. The fact of the matter is that in the early stages of industrialisation the ability of the working class to reproduce itself through domestic labour was severely curtailed. The degree of exploitation experienced by large sections of the nascent working class created conditions of life so appalling that household labour necessary for subsistence could not be adequately performed. That domestic labour was an objectively necessary form of production for the working class was demonstrated quite clearly by the effects of its absence.

In this context, the proposition examined in this chapter is that the considerable quantitative and qualitative development of working class household production in the second half of the 19th century was in large part a product of working class struggle. Although

not consciously articulated as "the struggle for the right to perform domestic labour - for the time, the energy, and the means of production necessary for that production", the struggle for shorter working hours, for higher wages, for a family wage, for decent housing and so on, created the material conditions for the more adequate performance of household labour, and hence the more adequate reproduction of the commodity labour-power.

Of course, if the right to perform domestic labour was won in large measure through working class struggle, the manner in which the performance of this labour was distributed between the sexes was definitely to the long-term detriment of working class women. The 'problem' of domestic labour, or rather its absence, was resolved through the emergence, particularly towards the end of the 19th century, of the role of full-time housewife for working class wives. Thus from the point of view of women, the expansion and development of the domestic sphere was profoundly contradictory; on the one hand the subsistence needs of themselves and their families could be more adequately met, but on the other hand, their relegation to the domestic sphere intensified the subordination as women.

The analysis briefly outlined in this introduction rests upon a number of assertions that now require substantiation. The questions posed are as follows: what evidence is there that the ability of the nascent industrial working class to reproduce itself through domestic labour was initially considerably

curtailed? In what way is it possible to make a connection between working class struggle and the development of household labour? Was there a quantitative and qualitative development of working class domestic labour in the second half of the 19th century? What was the relationship of the latter to the withdrawal of married women from paid employment in this period, and their assumption of the role of full-time housewife and mother? What were the consequences of these developments for the social position of women?

The first question is considered in section one. In section two I look at the relationship between working class struggle and the development of domestic labour. The sexual division of labour and the consequences for women of the rising incidence of full-time housewifery are briefly examined in section three. Finally, in section four, I return to political economy and the value thesis. The relationship between the value of the commodity labour-power and domestic labour is reviewed in the light of the historical analysis. The strength of the value thesis outlined in Part One is demonstrated here. The thesis not only withstands, but moves forwards, through historical concretisation.

1. The Material Conditions of Life and the Reproduction of Labour-Power 1800-1850

Throughout the pre-industrial period of capitalist development the separation of the direct producers from their means of production proceeded as an inexorable if uneven process. This process rapidly accelerated during the first phase of industrialisation, and as the 19th century advanced the expropriation of private property increasingly took the form not of the transformation of individual into capitalist private property, but the ruination of smaller capitalists by the larger:

> "What is now to be expropriated is not the self-employed worker, but the capitalist who exploits a large number of workers. The expropriation is accomplished through the action of the immanent laws of capitalist production itself, through the centralisation of capitals." (Marx 1976 pp.928-929).

Thus in the formation of a mass working class, the Industrial Revolution, that is, the initial phase of the transformation of capitalist manufacture into large-scale industry, was decisive. It dealt a heavy blow to surviving transitional forms of production and set in motion the forces that were to so rapidly revolutionise the foundations of production and conjure up an urban landscape. 'Freed' from the land and other independent means of production, the burgeoning class of wage-labourers obtained means of subsistence through the sale of their commodity labour-power. But in and of themselves,

the means of subsistence considered as use-values produced by capitalist industry and agriculture did not meet the requirements of the working class family. Domestic labour was objectively necessary if wage-goods were to be utilized and supplemented in a manner which ensured the adequate reproduction of human life and hence of the commodity labour-power itself.(1)

However, if the first generations of the industrial working class were faced with the objective necessity of performing household labour as well as labouring for the capitalist, many, probably most, were also confronted with domestic and environmental conditions so abysmal, hours of employment so lengthy, and wages so inadequate (even by the standard of mere physical subsistence) that household labour was severely curtailed. The history of the early factory workers and their contemporaries in other branches of industry and agriculture is well documented. However, in studying the poverty, degradation, and morbidity of the period historians generally neglect a factor of crucial importance, namely, the inability, particularly of the semi-skilled and unskilled masses, to reproduce themselves adequately through domestic labour. The tendency towards the physical destruction of two or three generations of wage workers was in part the consequence of the lack of time, and the inadequacy of the means, with which to engage in household labour. The effects of the absence of domestic life and domestic labour were not, however, lost upon Engels, whose study of the English working class of

the 1840s retains its force:

> "Thus the social order makes family life almost impossible for the worker. In a comfortless, filthy house, hardly good enough for mere nightly shelter, ill-furnished, often neither rain-tight nor warm, a foul atmosphere filling rooms overcrowded with human beings, no domestic comfort is possible. The husband works the whole day through, perhaps the wife also and the elder children, all in different places; they meet night and morning only, all under perpetual temptation to drink; what family life is possible under such conditions?... Neglect of all domestic duties, neglect of the children, especially, is only too common among the English working people, and only too vigorously fostered by the existing institutions of society." (Engels 1976 p.159).

As noted in Chapter Two, the historical basis of Marx's theoretical abstraction from domestic labour in Capital was precisely the contemporary undermining of proletarian household labour:

> "Compulsory work for the capitalist usurped the place, not only of the children's play, but also of independent labour at home, within customary limits, for the family itself." (Marx 1976 p.517).
>
> "...we see how capital, for the purposes of its self-valorization, has usurped the family labour necessary for its consumption." (Marx 1976 p.518).

We must now look in more detail at household labour in the first half of the 19th century.

The domestic labour process 1800-1850

The urban working class

In 1801 the population size in England and Wales was close to nine millions (first official census figure);

fifty years on it had doubled (Burnett 1966). The factors responsible for this unprecedented population growth rate are still the subject of debate amongst demographers; some argue that the main causative factor was a falling death rate while others stress an increasing birth rate. Associated with this accelerated population growth was the rapid spatial concentration of people in a small but growing number of urban centres; the number of cities with over 50,000 inhabitants was two in 1850, eight in 1800 and twenty-nine in 1851 (Merrett 1979). In 1801 one fifth of the population was urbanised, by 1851 it was one half, and four-fifths by 1901 (Burnett 1966).

The human flood flowing into the towns in the first half of the 19th century overwhelmed the existing housing stock, amenities and resources. Available houses were quickly subdivided and high rents charged forcing whole families to live in single and partitioned rooms, cellars and attics. Working class residential areas, particularly the poorest quarters, rapidly became foul slums. Some new buildings were erected to house the inflow of new workers and their dependents, but built for profit rather than utility and comfort, these constructions quickly decayed into over-crowded, disease-ridden tenements (Gauldie 1974). In general there was no provision for the removal of human, or any other waste; the filth piled up in courtyards, alleyways and unpaved, undrained streets. Thus one of the basic means of production for household labour - the physical structure comprising the 'home' - was of the lowest quality, on top

of which the general environs, instead of facilitating domestic labour, made its performance both more necessary and more difficult.

Among the greater obstacles to the effective performance of household labour was lack of adequate water supplies. In her study of women's housework in British Isles (1650-1950) Caroline Davidson (1982) stressed the importance of such supplies:

> "The spread of domestic piped water supplies was undoubtedly the most far-reaching change in housework in Britain between 1650 and 1950." (Davidson 1982 p.20)

> "Obtaining and transporting water was an onerous and everyday task for most women until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the supply of pipe water to houses became normal. This task was not always acknowledged as "housework". Yet it was a major household chore in its own right; and one of great importance for other activities such as cooking, washing-up, laundry, and cleaning. And it was nearly always women's work; men rarely fetched water unless they earned their living by doing so." (Davidson 1982 pp.7-8).

For much of the 19th century, housebuilding and the provision of water (later purified) and other general and infrastructural amenities was left entirely in the hands of private capital, at the mercy of individual capital's drive to accumulate and the operation of 'free market forces'. The dire consequences for public health, the quality of life in general, and 'morality', became the concern of increasing numbers of reformers and philanthropists. On the subject of water supplies one such, Edwin Chadwick, stated the following in his Report on the sanitary condition of the labouring population in

Great Britain (1842):

> "No previous investigation has led me to conceive the great extent to which the labouring classes are subjected to privations, not only of water for the purpose of ablution, house cleansing and sewerage, but of wholesome water for drinking, and culinary purposes." (cited in Davidson 1982 p.29).

Obtaining water in the towns involved expense, much fetching, carrying, and queueing at stand pipes, wells and water carts. These factors, combined with the lack of water storage facilities and the absence of sanitary conveniences such as sinks, toilets and drains, ensured that working class water consumption - both immediate individual consumption and productive consumption during domestic labour - was extremely low; in other words, water related household labour was severely curtailed (Davidson 1982). But piped water alone could not have solved the problem, as Lord Shaftsbury noted:

> "There are homes inhabited by the poor the floors of which a woman could not scrub because they were absolutely rotten and the more that is done to them the worse they become... the most cleanly woman could not be clean, even if the supply of water were at all times sufficient." (cited in Gauldie 1974 p.79).

Nevertheless, it appears that despite the objective problems associated with cleaning dwellings and their contents, cleanliness was almost universally aspired to:

> "...a strong puritan tradition of cleanliness survived among the working classes ready to show itself when the merest chance of more comfortable living occurred." (Gauldie 1974 p.89).

Wherever the material preconditions were present, the fireplace and hearth were regularly cleaned, rooms swept and dusted, floors and stairs washed and scrubbed, and pots and pans scoured. Mops, brooms, and brushes were frequently made at home out of woollen rags, or other materials in rural areas (Davidson 1982). Sand, natural stones for chalking and colouring, and lye remained the main cleaning agents throughout the period; they were only gradually replaced by soda, soap and other manufactured cleaning pastes, liquids and polishes (Davidson 1982). But despite their aspirations:

> "...for women living in squalid, over-crowded urban accommodation, often without access to piped water supplies, cleaning was a real and never-ending nightmare. No matter how hard they worked, they never ended up with clean homes." (Davidson 1982 p.134).

The ability of families to keep warm and cook for themselves was dependent upon obtaining fuel and having access to a hearth in which to burn it. Coal did not become the main domestic fuel in Britain until about 1840, and the fact that the urban working class had long since been denied access to traditional sources of fuel from the countryside (wood, peat, cattle dung, furze and so forth) meant that large numbers of people lived in unheated dwellings throughout the year. Even if coal could be afforded, rented rooms and cellars were frequently devoid of those facilities: iron grates, ranges and chimneys, necessary for coal burning (Davidson 1982). Those able to maintain an open fire could only adopt very simple cooking methods, namely boiling and frying.

Therefore, for a variety of reasons - lack of adequate means of production, lack of time and energy - the quantity of time devoted to cooking by the urban working class was minimal; food was generally eaten cold, or bought hot from street sellers hawking potatoes, pies and chestnuts, or from bakers who commonly roasted meats as well as supplying hot bread (Gauldie 1974). The Sunday dinner might be something of an exception because the time was available to prepare soups, broths, stews and puddings, but on the whole, the diet of the industrial working class in the early 19th century was far from adequate:

> "Eighteen forty eight rather than eighteen fifty marks the end of the hungry half-century, the period when the diet of the majority of town dwellers was at best stodgy and monotonous, at worst hopelessly deficient in quantity and nutriment." (Burnett 1966 p.50).

Laundering was a task made extremely difficult by the absence of piped water in the urban areas. Nevertheless, as with cleaning, it appears that women endeavoured to wash their family linen against all the odds:

> "The middle classes were quick to suggest that the poor did not wash at all, but then spoilt the argument by complaining about whole streets made impassable to carriages by lines of wet washing hung from house to house across the street. And there are many pathetic descriptions of poor women exhausted with fever and lack of nourishment struggling to wash children's clothes in water laboriously carried over courts and stairs." (Gauldie 1974 p.79)

There is some evidence of fairly widespread use of paid

washerwomen's services in the towns; Davidson, for example, is of the opinion that:

> "...most households were prepared to spend a high proportion of their incomes on laundry. In 1844 the washing expenses of labouring families in London amounted to about half the sum they spent on rent; for middle-class families the proportion was a third." (Davidson 1982 p.136).

The expansion of the capitalist soap industry in the first half of the 19th century laid the basis for a more effective method of washing clothes and other household linens, but its use required not only a plentiful water supply, but also considerable quantities of hot water.

The rural proletariat

Did the rural proletariat experience conditions of life more conducive to the adequate performance of household labour? If anything, things were worse for the agricultural workers and those employed in rural manufacture. Those who managed to retain a small plot of land upon which to grow vegetables or keep a cow or pig were able to supplement their extremely low wages to some degree, but this became increasingly rare. Large numbers became dependent upon poor relief:

> "Landowners and farmers began to regret the lost commons - the cow, the geese, the turfs - which had enabled the poor to subsist without coming to the parish overseer. Some cows came back: here and there potato patches made some headway: the Board of Agriculture lent its strenuous support to the allotment propaganda. But it was too late to reverse a general process; no common was ever brought back

> and few landowners would risk renting land (perhaps four acres for a cow at a minimum of £6 per annum) to a labourer." (Thompson 1968 p.244).

Although the Speenhamland system was radically reformed in 1834, an immediate improvement in rural living standards did not occur (Burnett 1966). Wages remained low for much of the century:

> "The melancholy picture which emerges is of a population which spent its life in semi-starvation, existing on a scanty and monotonous diet of bread, potatoes, root vegetables and weak tea. Fresh meat was scarcely ever seen, unless the labourer dared to incur the severity of the game laws by poaching a rabbit or a hare; 'meat' meant salt pork or bacon and a family was fortunate if it could afford these more than once a week. It is also clear that wheat flour was of poor quality, and that rye bread and the even less attractive barley bread were still extensively used in the midlands and the north. The one redeeming feature in the diet seems to have been the considerable quantities of fresh vegetables - potatoes, beans, onions, turnips, cabbages and so on - which the labourer unwillingly consumed." (Burnett 1966 p.23).

Enid Gauldie points out that the appalling housing conditions in rural areas were not simply the result of industrialism. Long before the Industrial Revolution the agricultural population had become accustomed to vermin-ridden slums and hovels with thatched roofs in a decayed state, neither wind nor rain proof, without ceilings or flooring. Lack of piped water supplies and sanitary conveniences, and the mud and stone interiors of dwellings, all conspired against the rural domestic labourer. Obtaining water was often more difficult than in the towns despite the greater variety of potential water sources because it had to be carried over greater

distances (Davidson 1982). However, there were more opportunities to perform water related domestic tasks out of doors, at the water source. In fact urbanisation and, later, the development of piped water supplies were:

> "...very significant in changing the locus of several household activities and in encouraging women to stay at home." (Davidson 1982 p.19).

As in town workers' dwellings, furniture was minimal and rudimentary, and soft-furnishings almost non-existent. The poorest families used piles of straw for bedding and large boulders for chairs; they possessed the minimum of cooking utensils, crockery and other domestic means of production. Eighteenth century eating habits persisted long into the 19th century:

> "...almost everybody ate off pewter plates or wooden trenchers which were only rinsed in cold water or wiped clean with bread, straw or bran. Poor people shared a communal cooking pot or bowl which was practically never washed at all" (Davidson 1982 p.133).

The living conditions of industrial workers residing in rural areas were commonly less favourable than those of the agricultural labourers. However, there was some 'planned' housing construction under the direction of a number of enlightened employers, of a comparatively high standard; Thomas Ashton was one such who provided buildings that:

> "...were of a far superior type than the ordinary working class dwelling. Three hundred homes built by him for his workpeople had a sitting room, kitchen,

> pantry, two or three bedrooms and a walled yard. The women appear to have taken pride in these model dwellings, for the cleanliness and comfort of their homes made this factory colony an object of wonder and admiration... but still the more important was the fact that Ashton did not encourage the employment of married women in his mills." (Collier 1964 p.50).

Some of these 'model dwellings' built in the first half of the 19th century had stone sinks, piped water, toilets, drains, and coal cellars. Under such conditions domestic labour, especially where women withdrew from paid labour to become full-time housewives, underwent both a quantitative expansion and qualitative improvement and development. Model villages were, however, few and far between, providing only a tiny proportion of ordinary working class families with some of the material conditions objectively required for the adequate performance of household labour.

The labour aristocracy

There was a stratum of workers whose conditions of life were well above the average for their class - the skilled workers, or labour aristocracy. Their relatively privileged position enabled them to adopt a pattern of domestic life which the majority of the working class could only begin to emulate towards the end of the 19th century. Their solution to the problem of household labour - a strict sexual division of labour, allocating to women the full-time responsibilities of housewifery - was important in shaping general working class aspirations concerning the desirable state of affairs in the domestic

sphere. It is instructive to briefly examine the material conditions of life of this labour aristocracy in the first half of the 19th century without, however, becoming embroiled in the controversies surrounding the 'aristocracy' concept.(2)

In the period of transition from manufacture to large-scale industry, sections of workers retained their skilled artisan and craftsmen status:

> "In some industries, the craftsmen's privileged position survived into workshop or factory production, through forces of custom, or combination and apprenticeship restriction, or because the craft remained highly skilled and specialised - fine and 'fancy' work in the luxury branches of the glass, wool and metal trades." (Thompson 1968 p.262).

On the other hand a 'new elite' arose in the iron, engineering and textile industries (Thompson 1968). In the absence of statistical data, the size of this strata of relatively highly paid workers can only be guessed at. According to one estimate, the 'working class' (those earning less than £100 per annum) was stratified as follows:

> "Dudley Baxter in 1867 put them [the working class] at 7.8 million out of a total of 10 million persons in England and Wales in receipt of independent incomes, not including dependents: of these, 1.1 million were the 'skilled labour class', 3.8 million the 'less skilled labour class', and 2.8 million 'agricultural workers and unskilled labour class'." (Burnett 1969 p.247).

Whatever the precise dimensions of the stratum, the labour aristocracy comprised a small proportion of the working class in the second half of the century, and was probably

of a similar social weight in the preceding fifty years. By its very nature the labour aristocracy had a fluid character bound up as it was with the rise and fall of industries, trades, occupations and skills throughout the period.

Insofar as their skilled status was secure, the high wages paid to male labour aristocrats made it possible for their wives to withdraw from the labour force and devote their time to household labour and childrearing. The families of skilled workers could escape the worst urban or rural housing conditions and rent accommodation providing the basic material prerequisites for domestic labour; in addition they could afford some elementary domestic means of production, furniture, bedding, and so on. Wives had both the time and the means with which to engage in the household labour necessary for the reproduction of themselves and their families. But the women paid a price for this solution to the problem of necessary domestic labour: the working class family could be adequately reproduced through domestic labour but at the expense of what, little, independence and status married women could secure through wage work. Domesticity meant all-round dependence, relegation to a 'private' sphere, and the drudgery of household labour which bore the characteristics of a pre-industrial labour process. If the objective necessity of household labour was the material basis of a division of labour both within the working class family, and between that family and capitalist industry and agriculture, the labour

aristocracy solidified that division into a sexual division of labour and elevated the latter to a sacred principle.

2. The Struggle for a Domestic Life

The experience of the labour aristocracy was exceptional. For the large majority of the working class, the period 1800 to 1850 was one in which household labour was severely limited and curtailed because of the material conditions of life created by the initial hectic phase of capitalist industrialisation. Below subsistence wages, mass recruitment and super-exploitation of female and child labour, over-extension of the length of the working day, slum housing conditions, over-crowding, lack of basic general amenities and domestic means of production - these were some of the factors responsible for the reduction of household labour to an inadequate and insufficient minimum. The working class family simply did not possess the time, the conditions (environmental and residential), or the means of production, with which to reproduce themselves and hence their commodity labour-power at a basic sustenance level. Under these conditions even the culture, the knowledge and practical skills of domestic labour began to be lost:

> "Not only did the working class lose the possibility of a domestic life through the industrial employment of all family members, but the domestic skills and traditions of the household were destroyed." (Curtis 1980 p.126).

Only the highest paid sections of the working class could begin to resolve the problem of household labour. The labour aristocracy became the bearer of that domestic culture within the working class. For the majority, poverty, hunger, illness and premature death were the overriding features of everyday life. Although machinery laid the necessary technical foundation for the transition from absolute to relative surplus-value production, the period of transition itself was necessarily characterised by the simultaneous, combined, extension of both forms. The insatiable appetite of the early industrial capitalists for profit meant that they used machinery to increase absolute surplus-value, particularly by lengthening the working day and drawing all members of the family into production without a corresponding rise in the wage accruing to the whole family. In addition, smaller employers engaged in petty thefts from their employees through arbitrary fining, short weighting, payments in kind with inferior goods, the truck system, and so forth. The 'natural working day' of twelve hours which had regulated labour-time in the period of manufacture was made obsolete by large-scale industry based on machine production:

> "Every boundary set by morality and nature, age and sex, day and night, was broken down." (Marx 1976 p.390).

The inability of the working class to adequately reproduce itself under these conditions signified the actual undermining of the general commodity labour-power.

Capital was pushing against, and overstepping, the physical and material limits within which the working class could produce and reproduce labour-power in a material and mental form adequate to capital itself. The process of capital accumulation was tending to destroy its own indispensible human basis, the raw material of exploitation: labour-power. A whole race of stunted individuals was coming into being, a race which was increasingly inadequate for the day to day requirements of the capitalist production process. Marx grasped this phenomenon:

> "Capital, which has such 'good reasons' for denying the suffering of the legions of workers surrounding it, allows its actual movement to be determined as much and as little by the sight of the coming degradation and final depopulation of the human race, as by the probable fall of the earth into the sun... Capital therefore takes no account of the health and the length of life of the worker unless society forces it to do so. Its answer to the outcry about the physical and mental degradation, the premature death, the torture of over-work, is this: 'Should that pain trouble us, since it increases our pleasure (profit)?' But looking at these things as a whole, it is evident that this does not depend on the will, either good or bad, of the individual capitalist. Under free competition, the immanent laws of capitalist production confront the individual capitalist as a coercive force external to him." (Marx 1976 pp.380-381).

This state of affairs could not continue indefinitely either from the point of view of the working class or capital. The degradation of labour-power as a result of accumulation by individual capitals was entering into ever sharper conflict with the immediate and long-term requirements of capital accumulation in general. Ultimately this contradiction was resolved through the

intervention of the state, acting in the general interests of the ruling class as a whole. This intervention particularly took the form of the Factory Acts and other protective legislation. But if factory legislation, including limitations upon the length of the working day, arose as a logical necessity from the contradictions and requirements of capital accumulation itself, and resolved the conflict between the individual interests of the capitalist class and its general interests, the question remains: how did this necessity become reality? Essentially this is a problem of understanding the nature and development of the capitalist state, something beyond the scope of this thesis. Nevertheless it is clear that the same material conditions which gave rise to the need for such legislation from the point of view of capital, gave rise at the same time to a material force capable of struggling for such legislation - that very working class, victim of those conditions, concentrated as a mass social and political force by the first phase of capital accumulation:

> "As soon as the working class, stunned at first by the noise and turmoil of the new system of production, had recovered its senses to some extent, it began to offer resistance, first of all in England, the native land of large-scale industry." (Marx 1976 p.390).

The state became the focus of the demands of an increasingly organised workers' movement (trade unions, Chartism). In the 1840s, this working class movement intersected divisions within the British ruling class and

eventually effective legislation was enacted (Marx 1976). Thus an apparent paradox: the enactment of factory legislation (soon extended to most branches of production) not only accorded with the most immediate and vital interests of the working class but also accorded with the general interests of the capitalist class and spurred on the historic development of capital accumulation. But this unity of interest between the working and the capitalist classes, which generally denoted the still historically progressive character of capitalism, was not an immediate but a contradictory unity. The common interest was not realised through the collaboration of the working with the capitalist class, but rather by the sharpest clash between them, that is, through class struggle.

At the most general level, the working class struggle for protective legislation was essentially a struggle to secure material conditions for the adequate reproduction of themselves as human beings. My argument is that, in part, this was a struggle to secure the time and the material prerequisites for the performance of household labour, the necessity of which impressed itself keenly upon all members of the working class family. Protective legislation, particularly the restriction of the length of the working day and the regulation of female and child labour, laid the basis for the transfer of a portion of total social labour-power from the sphere of capitalist production to the sphere of working class production for immediate subsistence. Although this loss of labour-power, both real and potential, had been

strongly resisted by individual capitalists, it did not conflict with long-term capital accumulation requirements.

Thus by the middle of the 19th century the most fundamental precondition for the development of working class household production was met - the availability of time for domestic labour such that the proletariat could expend a significant proportion of its aggregate labour-power in the domestic sphere directly for its own reproduction. Its actual development in the second half of the century, particularly the securing of essential domestic means of production through higher wages and the cheapening of commodities, was further facilitated by the tremendous growth and expansion of the British economy. From 1850 to 1873 capital accumulation proceeded apace. As a mature capitalism that no longer depended upon the super-exploitation of cheap child and female labour, there was room for some improvement in working class living standards. By the turn of the century the large-scale withdrawal of married women from the labour force had taken place and full-time housewifery had become the 'normal' occupation of working class wives. Despite the contradictory consequences of this for women, the quantitative and qualitative development of domestic labour had a progressive content. Unfortunately, in much of the Marxist literature a functionalist approach to the theoretical analysis of domestic labour leads towards an opposite conclusion; because household labour is discussed entirely in terms of its functionality or benefits for capital, any expansion of this labour can only be

interpreted as a reactionary manifestation of capital's interests - whether economic (for example, domestic labour is seen as either producing surplus-value directly, or indirectly by lowering the value of labour-power), or ideological (the working class family as a factor in political stabilisation). In strong contrast I have argued that although the development of domestic labour was objectively in the long-term interests of capital in that it ensured the adequate social reproduction of the commodity labour-power, the working class had to engage in struggle <u>against</u> the capitalist class to obtain the material prerequisites of the domestic labour process - both domestic labour-power and means of production. For the working class the struggle for domestic labour was literally a life or death struggle. It was the objective necessity of domestic labour in an economic system based on generalised commodity production which compelled the exploited class to fight for its development. This, I believe is the correct way to pose the relationship between objective factors and subjective interests in the historical development of a particular form of production.

3. Working Class Housewifery and the Development of Household Labour

That the working class considerably increased its domestic labour-time in the second half of the 19th century cannot be proved in any direct or immediate empirical fashion: the time-budget studies detailing the

quantity of time spent in paid and unpaid labour are a 20th century phenomenon. The evidence is circumstantial: it rests upon the development of the role of full-time housewife for working class wives.

Ann Oakley (1974) provides figures to demonstrate that the latter part of the century saw the large-scale withdrawal of married women from the labour force and "...the rising incidence of housewifery as [their] sole occupation" (Oakley 1974 p.44); in 1851 one in four women whose husbands were living were employed, by 1911 the proportion was only one in ten.(3) Oakley concludes that:

> "The most important and enduring consequence of industrialisation for women has been the emergence of the modern role of housewife as the 'dominant mature feminine role'." (Oakley 1974 p.32).

A lack of statistical data makes it difficult to identify the precise pattern of withdrawal of these wives from capitalist employment. Was it a gradual process, or one that occurred primarily in the closing years of the 19th century? Leonore Davidoff, who made a study of married women's employment in the period from 1850 to 1950, could only conclude:

> "The extent of the practice throughout that century is unknown, but it is probable that the proportion of married women doing work outside their homes fell from about 1850 to about 1920, when, very slowly, it began to increase" (Davidoff 1956 p.32).

Davidoff does indicate, however, that a decline in labour force participation amongst older married women occurred

in the 1880s (women over 45 years of age); the prior and subsequent decrease may perhaps be accounted for by the withdrawal of younger wives from paid employment.(4)

Clearly if protective legislation and other factors enabled the working class to redistribute its labour-power between the domestic and capitalist spheres in this period, it was almost exclusively female labour-power that was transferred to household production. If in its <u>content</u> the struggle over the redistribution of labour-power in favour of household production was progressive, the <u>form</u> of its conscious articulation and manifestation served to further consolidate gender inequalities. The demand for protective legislation was consciously articulated by organised labour (the trade unions, Chartists, Ten Hours Movement) as a demand for the regulation and restriction of female and child labour. And, of course, the Factory Acts of the mid-19th century were sex and age specific. The 1844 Act limited the hours of employment of women and young persons (under 18 year olds) in the textile industry to twelve per day, to be worked between 5.30 a.m. and 8.30 p.m.. In 1847, an amendment to the Act reduced the hours to ten per day, although this did not take effect until 1851. Protective legislation of a similar kind was later enacted relating to other branches of industry (in fact, the earlier 1842 Mines Regulation Act, was the first sex-specific protective legislation (Humphries 1981)).

The outcome of the struggle was therefore contradictory. On the one hand the ability to perform

objectively necessary household labour was in the interests of both working class women and men. On the other hand, the way in which the sexual division of labour was consolidated inside the family as a unit of production, and, as a result, within the sphere of capitalist production itself, intensified the oppression of working class women. This sexual division of labour within the family cannot be explained by 'natural' imperatives. While it is clear that someone had to expend labour-power in domestic labour, there is no inherent reason why it should have become almost exclusively the responsibility of the female family members. As I argued in Chapter One, the explanation of this allocation of domestic tasks to women demands an independent analysis of the history of the sexual division of labour in general and of its material basis, something beyond the scope of this thesis. What the analysis in this chapter does reveal is that although the development of domestic labour in the 19th century was associated with the polarisation of gender roles, it is neither explained by, nor explains, the nature of this sexual division of labour.

The contradiction embodied in the housewife role stems from the fact that it expresses the two-sided oppression of working class women - their class and sexual oppression. It is a real contradiction; in the 19th century, becoming a full-time housewife was neither entirely negative (it facilitated the reproduction of the working class family), nor entirely positive (it intensified the economic, political and ideological

oppression of working class women). Thus I would take issue with Heidi Hartmann's (1979) interpretation of the struggle for protective legislation in which only the negative side of the contradiction is stressed. Hartmann identifies male interests and patriarchal power behind the fight for, and the nature of, the legislation; she argues that male workers were thoroughly opposed to the proletarianisation of women and children because it threatened their authority and privilege in the home and exposed them to unfair competition in the labour market. This interpretation is entirely at one with Hartmann's theorisation of household labour discussed in Chapter One. Precisely because the emergence and development of domestic labour is linked to the manifestation of male power rather than to any material reproductive imperatives in a society based upon a system of generalised commodity production, the establishment of a domestic life through the restriction of the length of the working day and of female and child employment has, for Hartmann, no progressive content or meaning whatsoever.

Unlike Hartmann, Jane Humphries (1977(a), 1977(b), 1981) identifies a unity of interests between working class men and women in that same struggle. Summarising her own position as against Hartmann's she states:

> "...the working class family is described, not as an instrument of social control, nor as an arena for male exploitation of female labour power, but as an institution which sometimes united working men and women around common interests and promoted social obligation, and hence provided a space for the

> development of class consciousness. Similarly the payment of male wages sufficient to maintain a wife and children, which Hartmann sees as the material basis for working men's exploitation of their wives and daughters - as the thirty pieces of silver with which bourgeois men 'bought off' their proletarian counterparts - could, alternatively, be seen as the (imperfectly realised) historically specific goal of working class men and women struggling in a hostile environment for a better life." (Humphries 1981 p.4).

While my own interpretation of the struggle is much closer to Humphries' than to Hartmann's, albeit from a different understanding of its material basis in the working class family, it is important to stress that the unity of interests between men and women in the struggle for protective legislation, the family wage, and other measures facilitating the development of household labour, was not an absolute but a thoroughly contradictory one.(5)

4. The Reproduction of Labour-Power: Use-Value and Value

In this chapter I have concentrated on the reproduction of labour-power in the 19th century from the point of view of the use-value of the means of subsistence and the use-value of the commodity labour-power - the reproduction of the working class as the material bearer of the capacity to labour. To finish I want to consider the value of these means of subsistence and the value of the commodity labour-power within this historical context. It will become clear that this entails both a concretisation of the value thesis presented in Chapter Two as well as a confirmation of the methodological basis of that thesis. Two issues are examined. The first is the

role of domestic labour in ensuring that the working class realises the full value of it's labour-power. The second is the relationship between the expansion of household labour in the second half of the 19th century and the fact that this was precisely the period in which capital accumulation became firmly based on the production of relative as opposed to absolute surplus-value.

I have established that in the first industrial phase the reproduction of the commodity labour-power was undermined. The ability of individual capitalists to maximise the appropriation of absolute surplus-value in the period of the introduction of machinofacture and large-scale industry went unchecked by social and natural limits. In the exchange between the working class and capital, the working class as a whole did not secure the full value of it's labour-power, although the small labour aristocratic sections did. This was not solely a question of wage levels - of the price of labour-power falling below it's value. In explaining why the working class did not realise the full value of it's labour-power, two other factors are of crucial importance:

i) Capital abused the use-value of labour-power in the capitalist production process by the extraordinary lengthening of the working day and the creation of abominably unhealthy and dangerous working conditions combined with the extreme intensification of labour associated with the introduction of machinery.

ii) Capital, by extending the working day and turning every family member into a wage-labourer, usurped necessary domestic labour-time as well as time necessary for relaxation, recouperation, and the healthy development of children.

The first point was clearly made by Marx in Capital Volume One.(6) It is a precondition of the realisation of the value of labour-power that the capitalist class does not 'over-use' the commodity it has purchased.(7) Marx expresses this through the voice of the worker addressing the capitalist:

> "The use of my daily labour-power therefore belongs to you. But by means of the price you pay for it everyday, I must be able to reproduce it every day, thus allowing myself to sell it again... By an unlimited extension of the working day you may in one day use up a quantity of labour-power than I can restore in three. What you gain in labour, I lose in the substance of labour. Using my labour and despoiling it are quite different things... You pay me for one day's labour-power, while you use three days of it. That is against our contract and the law of commodity exchange... I demand a normal working day because, like every other seller, I demand the value of my commodity." (Marx 1976 p.343).

Capital's usurption of domestic labour-time had a similar effect: it prevented the realisation of the full value of labour-power by undermining household labour which, as we have seen, is socially necessary for the normal day to day reproduction of that commodity. Insofar as the working class struggle for a 'normal' working day was a struggle for the time and the material prerequisites with which to perform domestic labour, this was, from the

perspective of the value of the commodity labour-power, a struggle for the preconditions for the production and full realisation of the value of this commodity.

This is an important point in relation to the political economy of domestic labour. In Chapter Two I identified domestic labour as a form of production which uniquely combines direct subsistence production and simple commodity production. In this connection I examined the dual process of the transfer of the value of wage-goods and the creation of new value in the domestic labour process. On the basis of the historical analysis in this chapter it is now possible to add that domestic labour is also a precondition of the realisation of the full value of the commodity labour-power. The capacity to labour is the only commodity the working class has to sell to obtain the necessities of life. By usurping domestic labour-time, which actually means a usurpation of domestic labour-power, capital brought about a deterioration in the conditions of production of this commodity thereby robbing the working class of the opportunity of realising the rightful value of this, its possession.

We have seen that the transfer of a quantity of society's labour-power from the capitalist sphere of production to the household did occur in the course of the 19th century. The conditions for the realisation of the value of the commodity labour-power were met through an expansion in the social labour-time devoted to its production. However, if the expansion of domestic production facilitated the realisation of the value of

labour-power, what bearing did it have on other aspects of the relationship between domestic labour and the value of this commodity?

Increasing household production could only have meant an increase in the value of labour-power (assuming that everything else remained the same). This is for two reasons following directly from the dual character of domestic labour as a commodity producing labour. The first reason relates to the role of domestic labour in the transfer of the value of the domestic means of production. As in any labour process its temporal extension requires a corresponding increase in the quantity of means of production productively consumed. In the domestic context, an increase in the productive consumption of domestic means of production would signify an increase in the value transferred to the commodity labour-power. The second reason relates to the new value created by domestic labour. A quantitative expansion in domestic labour-time would signify an increase in the amount of new value created by domestic labour.

It is indisputable that since the middle of the 19th century, household production has considerably expanded in Britain and other advanced capitalist nations (the 20th century trends are discussed in the following chapter). This implies an increase in the value of the commodity labour-power corresponding to this expansion for both the reasons outlined. But such a rise in the value of labour-power, everything else remaining the same, must impinge on surplus-value appropriation by the capitalist

class; it is directly contrary to the most immediate interests of that class. However, everything does not remain the same.

The first half of the 19th century in Britain was the period of transition from the dominance of absolute to relative surplus-value production as the basis of capital accumulation. The historical expansion and development of domestic labour has therefore been coterminous with the era of relative surplus-value production and the massive increase in the productivity of labour associated with it.

Thus, historically two counterposed tendencies have been acting upon the value of the commodity labour-power. One has been the tendency to <u>raise</u> the value of labour-power as a result of the expansion and development of household production which effects the value of labour-power in the twofold sense already explained. The other, far stronger tendency, has been the <u>reduction</u> of the value of labour-power through the capitalistic cheapening of the means of subsistence, which here include the domestic means of production. While the British working class raised its standard of living through obtaining the time and the means of production necessary for an adequate performance of domestic labour after 1850, at the same time, and for the next quarter of a century, British capitalism underwent an unprecedentedly rapid tempo of capital accumulation. <u>Both</u> were made possible by large-scale industry and the dominance of relative surplus-value production. Thus capital could tolerate a considerable

raising of working class living standards, in part achieved through domestic labour, as this did not come into fundamental conflict with the appropriation of surplus-value and the accumulation of capital.

CHAPTER SIX

TECHNOLOGY, DOMESTIC LABOUR-TIME, AND WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

If the latter half of the 19th century saw the withdrawal of working class wives from the labour force, the reverse trend became evident in the war years (especially 1939-45) and accelerated in the post-war period of this century. The central theme in this chapter is the interrelationship between this trend and two other factors: the 20th century transformation of the domestic means of production, and the amount of time expended in household labour, or more specifically, women's domestic labour-time.

Either implicit or explicit in many studies of the changing position of women in 20th century Britain and North America, particularly those relating to the post-war period, is the view that household labour-time has been reduced to such an extent that married women are able, at least when free from responsibility for pre-school children, to take on full-time or part-time paid employment outside the home (see, for example, Simeral 1978, Szymanski 1976, Markusen 1975, Power 1983). Diminishing household labour has therefore come to be seen as one important causal factor in the rapid growth of women's, especially married women's, participation in the active labour force.

The reasons for this purported decline in household labour are generally identified as, firstly, technological developments affecting housework - the diffusion and proliferation of 'labour-saving devices', especially domestic electrical appliances - in short it's mechanisation and the consequent raising of the productivity of labour in the sphere of the home, a rise further intensified by the capitalist mass production of means of consumption - ready-made clothing, convenience foods, and so on; and secondly, a continuing process of socialisation of household tasks and childcare - their removal from the home and their substitution by capitalistically produced material commodities and services, or by state services. It is also argued that associated with this decline in household labour has been the disappearance of the full-time housewife, a once proud species whose extinction was noted recently in the pages of "The Guardian" newspaper:

> "When I was a little girl, the housewife swarmed and was not the shy bird she has become. Mercifully, her passing has been swift. It is no older than planned parenthood, increased consumerism, supermarkets, and the proliferation of labour-saving devices in the home. The fact is, homes don't need wives any more." (Irma Kurtz, 'Is there a dinosaur in the home?' The Guardian, 4/2/1985).

Thus, to the conventional economic and sociological wisdom that women's role in the family is not a productive one, is added a new twist: maybe our grandmothers suffered an endless round of domestic drudgery, but women who are not employed today are manufacturing nothing so much as

unnecessary work if they claim to spend all day doing housework.

Even some important Marxist studies of advanced capitalist economies also identify a decline of the household sphere of production at the expense of expanding private and state capitalist activity, with a corresponding increase in women's labour force participation. Mandel's Late Capitalism contains the following passage:

> "[Late Capitalism is characterised by] ...increasing displacement of the proletarian family as a unit of production, and the tendency for it to be displaced even as a unit of consumption. The growing market for pre-cooked meals and tinned foods, ready-made clothes and vacuum cleaners, and the increasing demand for all kinds of domestic household appliances, corresponds to the rapid decline of the production of immediate use-values within the family, previously cared for by the worker's wife, mother and daughter: meals, clothes and direct services for the entire household i.e. heating, cleaning, washing and so on. Since the reproduction of the commodity labour-power is increasingly achieved by means of capitalistically produced commodities and capitalistically organised and supplied services, the material basis of the individual family disappears in the sphere of consumption as well." (Mandel 1980 pp.391-392).

In his study of monopoly capitalism and the labour process Harry Braverman states:

> "Apart from its biological functions, the family served as a key institution of social life, production and consumption. Of these three, capitalism leaves only the last, and that in attenuated form, since even as a consuming unit the family tends to break up into component parts that carry on consumption separately." (Braverman 1974 p.277).

However, quite different conclusions have been

drawn by others. One school of non-Marxist economists have, within the last twenty years, discovered in unpaid household production a new field for investigation and research now termed the 'New Home Economics' (see for example, Becker 1976, Gronau 1977, 1980). Far from seeing household production as in serious decline it is variously argued that it is only in gradual decline, or remarkably stable, or even an expanding sector of the economy. In fact within this perspective a large literature now exists concerning the 'value' of household - or non-market oriented - production, its exclusion from national accounting, and its estimated contribution to the GNP. In this literature a variety of complex formulae have been developed expressing the interaction of market and non-market oriented activity (this question has been of interest to some economists since the 1920s).(1) In opposition to traditional non-Marxist economic theory in which the household is viewed simply and exclusively as a sphere of consumption, the New Home Economics and other household 'value' approaches have the merit of asserting the necessity of understanding the household as a sphere of production. However, its proponents still apply the traditional concepts:

> "The integration of production and consumption is at odds with the tendency of economists to separate them sharply, production occurring only in firms and consumption in households. It should be pointed out, however, that in recent years economists increasingly recognise that a household is truly a 'small factory': it combines capital goods, raw material and labour to clean, feed, procreate and otherwise produce useful commodities." (Becker, cited in Berk 1980 p.115).

In a book published by the International Labour Office, Goldschmidt-Clermont (1982) reviews many of the non-Marxist studies conducted in several countries which impute a 'value' to household labour, or measure the time spent in household production; she notes:

> "...to date, two out of three of the macro-economic evaluations situate the value of household production ...somewhere between 25 and 40 per cent of the accounted gross national product of industrialised societies. This gives a rough indication of its order of magnitude in monetary terms." (Goldschmidt-Clermont 1982 p.4).

In another review of the studies, Hawrylyshyn concludes that in most industrialised countries the 'value' of household production is equivalent to one third the size of the accounted GNP and that this figure, "...is little affected by calculating averages for pre-war and post-war separately". (Hawrylyshyn 1976 p.128).

Related to the 'value' studies are time-use or time-budget studies which attempt to quantify the time spent in housework/household labour. These are interesting and important, but unfortunately for my purposes are largely confined to North America and continental Europe; there is relatively little data pertaining to the British Isles. Although these studies differ in method and precise subject of analysis, their results are broadly comparable and surprisingly similar. They reveal a general <u>constancy of household labour-time in the 20th century</u> as we shall see in some detail later. They do not support the view that there has been a steady secular decline in the time

spent in housework and childcare over past decades.

Thus we are presented with conflicting interpretations concerning the development of household labour in this century. Has domestic labour-time declined or not? What has been the impact of developments in household technology? Can the increasing participation of married women in paid employment be explained (wholly or partially) by decreasing hours of household labour, perhaps brought about as a consequence of change in the domestic means of production? In the following discussion I attempt to answer these questions. In order to do so it is useful first of all to consider the domestic means of production in more detail.

1. The Revolution in the Domestic Means of Production

It might seem self-evident that technology facilitating the mechanisation of housework reduces both the physical burden of domestic labour and the time expended in its performance. Marx, however, opened his chapter on machinery and large-scale industry in Capital Volume One with this remark by John Stuart Mill: "It is questionable if all the mechanical inventions yet made have lightened the day's toil of any human being". Marx added,

> "Mill should have said, 'of any human being not fed by other people's labour', for there is no doubt that machinery has greatly increased the number of distinguished idlers." (Marx 1976 p.492).

Certainly, as Marx demonstrates, the aim of the application of machinery in capitalist production is not to lighten toil but to increase surplus-value production through raising the productivity of labour. Clearly, in any discussion of the impact of technological change in the means of production for household labour, one must at all times make a distinction between the potential of technology to reduce toil and labour-time on the one hand, and the way in which the technology is utilised within a particular set of social relations of production, which may, or may not, result in this potential being realised through a significant reduction in labour-time.

A direct causal relationship between household technology and domestic labour-time is frequently asserted, for example:

> "With modern prepared foods, refrigerators, and microwave ovens the job of feeding the family has come to require only a fraction of what it formerly required of women's time. The introduction of washing machines, wash-and-wear clothes, vacuum cleaners, and dishwashers has likewise shrunk the necessary time for cleaning, washing and ironing." (Szymanski 1976 p.36).

> "The first important changes were indoor plumbing, gas and electricity. These have been followed by innovations in equipment for laundering, cooking and cleaning. These developments have reduced the amount of time women must spend in the home on these chores." (Simeral 1978 p.168).

Such assertions lead to comfortable conclusions like this:

> "The growth of monopoly capitalism, then, has converted women into educated household managers, machine operators, and consumers." (Markhusen 1975 p.44).

Does the evidence support such assertions? Only in the last fifteen years has serious attention been paid to the study of the relationship between the domestic labour process and technology (Cowan 1974, 1976, 1983, Vanek 1978, Robinson 1980, Hartmann 1981, Luxton 1980, Strasser 1978, 1980(a), 1980(b), Davidson 1982). While these studies have shown that there has been considerable technological change in the home, the findings warn against oversimplistic conclusions concerning change in domestic labour-time. Ruth Schwartz Cowan's work on household technology in the United States, for example, highlights the magnitude of the 20th century 'technological revolution' in the home, indeed she even refers to the 'industrialisation' of household labour, but points out, as do other researchers, that the relationship between technology and time spent in housework is a complex and not a directly causal one.

In order to pursue this more closely, it is instructive to look at the domestic labour-process in more detail than was the case in Chapter Two, and in particular, to review 20th century change in the domestic means of production. By means of production is meant both the objects and instruments of labour. Here I follow Marx's categorisation of the material elements of <u>the labour process in general</u>. The <u>object of labour</u> consists of that thing, or complex of things, upon which labour acts, including those objects acted upon in a previous labour process. The <u>instrument of labour</u>:

> "...is a thing, or a complex of things which the worker counterposes between himself and the object of his labour and which serves as a conductor, directing his activity onto that object. He makes use of the mechanical, physical and chemical properties of some substances in order to set them to work on other substances as instruments of his power, and in accordance with his purposes." (Marx 1976 p.285).

Further,

> "In a wider sense we may include among the instruments of labour, in addition to the things through which the impact of labour on its object is mediated, and which therefore, in one way or another, serve as conductors of activity, all the objective conditions necessary for carrying on the labour process. These do not enter directly into the process, but without them it is either impossible for it to take place, or possible only to a partial extent... instruments of this kind, which have already been mediated through past labour, include workshops, canals, roads, etc." (Marx 1976 p.286).

These categories are essential analytic tools for dissecting the domestic labour process and classifying the means of production involved. My intention is not to give an exhaustive or definitive technical categorisation but simply to use such an approach as a basis for identifying in broad outline the technological and material developments affecting the domestic labour process. All advanced industrialised societies have witnessed major changes in virtually all categories of domestic means of production.

The workplace

The central site for the majority of tasks associated with domestic labour, the work environment, is the dwelling place itself - the house, flat, apartment etc. The home plays a double part, it is both the site of much of the family's consumption activities and a

workplace.

The dual process of urbanisation and suburbanisation has continued as a major social trend in industrial nations in the this century. There are two points to be made here. First, despite changing fashions and innovations in architecture, construction and urban planning, all of which have diversified housing design, the domestic environment as embodied in the individual housing unit remains largely unchanged in its spatial and logistic fundamentals. In spite of the visions and practical endeavours of generations of 19th and 20th century 'material feminists' (Hayden 1982) (2) who strove for the kitchenless home and experimented with public kitchens, community dining, and housewives co-operatives, the fact that domestic labour has not been socialised has prevented any revolutionary transformation in the nature of working class living arrangements and the domestic work environment. I cannot elaborate upon this interesting theme here, only point out that it has been the subject of recent research (Hayden 1982, Vaiou-Hadjimichalis 1985, Rose 1980). Second, despite this lack of fundamental change, important advances have been made affecting the home as workplace through developments in construction and the supply of water which, combined with legislation on housing standards, have contributed to improvements in working class housing conditions. Other obvious advances include the alleviation of chronic overcrowding, the clearance of the worst slums, and the increase in the size, number, and functionality of rooms in housing built

since 1900. New materials used in construction (plastics, metals, plasters, woods, varnishes, glass, ceramics) have had an important impact on various domestic labour tasks. Modern fittings, fixtures and utilities incorporated into kitchen design have been particularly important; here Feminists like Catharine Beecher have had some influence (Hayden 1982). The development of ideas for streamlined kitchens with integrated work areas, continuous work surfaces and compact work arrangements, has influenced design and construction facilitating some degree of rationalisation in the kitchen work process and in the organisation of the domestic labour process as a whole (Luxton 1980).

Utilities

i) The spread of domestic piped water supplies, and particularly the development and gradual diffusion of integrated water heating systems supplying hot water on tap, has had an enormous impact on the domestic work process. This has eliminated a centuries old domestic chore - obtaining and transporting water - and has had an equally important effect on other domestic tasks - food preparation and cooking, laundering, cleaning, and bathing.

ii) In the field of fuel and energy the diffusion of domestic gas and electricity supplies has been a predominantly 20th century development. It profoundly

affected household lighting, eliminating another ancient domestic chore - the provision of the means of illumination. More importantly, efficient lighting meant the practical possibility of extending normal domestic labour into the hours of darkness. More efficient heating eliminated other traditional tasks while simultaneously creating another material precondition for the extension of normal domestic labour-time, particularly in the cold and dark months of winter.

Electricity provided an energy source for the development of a wide variety of domestic appliances of universal application within this sphere. Interestingly, both gas and electricity were discovered as sources of energy long before their domestic potential was exploited; not one of their first applications was domestic (Davidson 1982). If piped water was the first utility to really revolutionise domestic labour, the provision of a reliable electricity supply to the household, itself a product of a technological revolution in the development of large-scale capitalist industry, revolutionised it yet again.

Tools and implements

Relevant here are manual tools and manually powered mechanical implements (early sewing machines, carpet sweepers, hand whisks, etc.). The most important change in these instruments of labour in this century has been not so much in their fundamental character or variety as in the materials from which they are made. In her study of three generations of Canadian housewives Meg Luxton

noted a decline in the specialisation of tools and materials characteristic of late 19th and early 20th century housework, especially those used in food preparation:

> "As industry took over major aspects of food preparation with the development of processed foods, much of a housewife's food preparation work was eliminated and many specialised tools were no longer needed." (Luxton 1980 p.137).

However, there have been strong tendencies in the opposite direction. While 19th century household management manuals directed at the servant-employing class recommended dozens of specialised tools and implements, the average British working class family in the early 20th century (particularly in urban areas) possessed very few of these aids. Today's working class family often possesses a large collection of such means of production - vascular implements like pots, pans, bowls, crockery, buckets, basins, pails, as well as specialised utensils for cutting, slicing, kneading, grating, mixing, squeezing. In addition, they own a wide variety of manually powered household implements - mops, brushes, sponges, dusters, cloths, carpet sweepers, tools for painting and decorating, manual home repair tools, gardening implements and so on.

In the early decades of the period under discussion many household tools were made from materials such as tin, iron, copper, brass, silver, wood, zinc, agate and granite (Luxton 1980). These materials required time consuming, difficult, and specialised cleaning

procedures. The introduction of new 'easy clean' materials such as stainless steel, aluminium, enamel and plastic, has considerably simplified cleaning methods and led to the development of standardised ready-mixed cleaning agents. Developments in ceramics have improved both the quantity and quality of table and ovenware available to the working class. New hard-wearing fabrics and synthetic fibres have replaced wool, cotton and linen as the materials used in the manufacture of washing and cleaning implements. In addition we now have aluminium foil, grease proof paper, wire wools and so forth.

Chemical agents

These are utilised primarily for cleaning, washing and bathing. Included are solid and liquid soaps, washing powders and other laundry solutions, bleaches, disinfectants, sterilising agents, polishes, powders, dyes, oven-cleaning agents, waxes and so forth. Characteristic of such modern chemical agents is a high degree of standardisation and the fact that they are usually ready-mixed in solid, liquid or aerosol form. In the 19th and early 20th centuries a wide range of chemicals and powders had to be purchased, stored and mixed for the correct cleaning of tools and fabrics. Thus a considerable knowledge of mixing techniques was required (Luxton 1980). It is a debatable point whether the domestic labourer is now exposed to more or fewer poisonous chemicals in the performance of these tasks.

Mechanical means of production

This is the area in which the supply of electricity to the household has had such a revolutionary impact. Not surprisingly much of the discussion concerning technological change and domestic work is limited to the question of mechanisation. However, while the mechanisation and automation of certain household tasks has had a decisive impact on the domestic labour process, I hope to have demonstrated that there have been other significant innovations which deserve attention.

Mechanisation has penetrated the home through the development and diffusion of domestic appliances mainly designed and produced by private capitalist industries. These are frequently categorised as the so-called 'labour-saving devices'. In an early study of household mechanisation Giedion states:

> "The curtailment of household labour is achieved through mechanisation of work processes once performed by hand, mainly cleaning operations: laundering, ironing, dishwashing, carpet sweeping, furniture cleaning. To these must be added mechanised heating and refrigeration processes." (Giedion 1948 p.512).

Susan Strasser (1978, 1980(b)) has pointed out that in the analysis of the impact of mechanisation on housework it is not the date of an invention which is significant, but the point in time when the diffusion of the product to the mass of the population becomes possible or actual. The material prerequisite of this is the product's cheapening through capitalist mass production. These points apply to other technological innovations in

the non-mechanical means of production as well. Strasser argues in the American context:

> "A variety of devices and services were invented and marketed before 1900 which were eventually to have substantial effects on household routine. But their diffusion has been exaggerated by popular writers, who have drawn their material from the upper classes and concentrated on invention rather than diffusion. All of the major domestic appliances were invented - or at least their major operating principles were perfected before 1900. The technological potential of the 19th century home was fairly high; it could only be achieved, however, by wealthy people in urban areas. Indoor plumbing, electricity and gas, the innovations which ended the necessity for making fires and carrying water, were luxuries." (Strasser 1978 p.30).

Taken together, the domestic supply of gas and electricity and the development of the small-scale electric motor as the basis of the design of much compact domestic machinery, formed the material prerequisites of the wide-scale diffusion of mechanised household appliances. Combined with the earlier development of piped water systems, these innovations were decisive.

In the main, appliances are of three basic types (Corley 1966)

i) <u>appliances for space heating, water heating and cooking</u>

For centuries the open fire was instrumental in all these functions. The replacement of the hearth has produced a variety of specialised mechanical appliances including gas and electric water and space heaters of different kinds: kettles, boilers, central heating systems, as well as many types of cooker, coffee-making machines, toasters, microwave ovens. The elimination of

tasks associated with the making, maintenance and tending of fires was of great significance. The development of timing and thermostatic regulation mechanisms for space heating and cooking increased efficiency in certain domestic tasks. Thermostatically regulated cookers facilitated precision and greater sophistication in culinary technique, influencing food and dietary habits, as did refrigeration and mass production techniques in the processed food industry.

ii) appliances which reduce or replace manual effort

These include: vacuum cleaners, washing machines, spin dryers, tumble dryers, food mixers and processors, dishwashers, floor polishers and so on. Insofar as means of transport are essential for the reproduction of the commodity labour-power (shopping trips, transport to work, recreational travel), private cars, cycles, and other privately owned vehicles must also be included here. In addition there are mechanised tools utilised in gardening and 'do-it-yourself' tasks in the home: lawn mowers, hedge cutters, drills and so forth. These appliances dispense with much of the heavy physical labour which was necessarily part of pre-mechanised cleaning, laundry and food preparation tasks.

Using these appliances in the domestic labour process can result in greater efficiency. For example, a vacuum cleaner removes far more dust and dirt than a broom ever could. In other words, standards are raised, or the quality of the product of domestic labour is improved: so

floors, furnishings and clothing may be cleaner, food may be of a higher quality. On the other hand, their use can result in a rise in the productivity of domestic labour: either a greater quantity can be produced in the same time, or the same quantity can be produced in less time. But these two aspects of the development of the labour process - the qualitative and the quantitative - are interdependent and react upon each other. So, if higher standards, that is, increased utility from the point of view of household consumption, is pursued then the time-saving potential embodied in some appliances may not be realised; quite the contrary. For example, an automatic washing machine can reduce time spent in laundering the equivalent of an early 20th century weekly washload, but today, for a number of reasons, a greater quantity of clothes and linens are washed, and washed far more frequently.(3)

As with the means of production in capitalist industry to which there is always a definite technical link, the continuous redesign and refinement of domestic technology renders old models obsolete. Whilst most appliances require a combination of electrical and manual operation, successive models tend towards the reduction of the latter in favour of the former, that is, there is a tendency towards automation even in the household. But, some early models merely changed the character of manual labour, rather than eliminating it:

> "The early washing machines did not drastically reduce the time that had to be spent on household

> laundry, as they did not go through their cycles automatically and did not spin dry; the housewife had to stand guard, stopping and starting the machine at appropriate times, adding soap, sometimes attaching the drain pipes and putting the clothes through the wringer manually. The machine did, however, reduce a good part of the drudgery that once had been associated with washday, and this was a matter of no small consequence." (Cowan 1976 p.5).

iii) other mechanical appliances

These include refrigerators, freezers and electric irons. In her study, Meg Luxton notes in relation to refrigeration:

> "The effects of the development of refrigeration on household labour were indirect. Some of the key changes took place outside the household in the area of food production, distribution and marketing. The types of food available to the housewife changed, thus altering dietary preferences and food preparation. The introduction of refrigerators and freezers made it possible to have food on hand and allowed women to cut back on canning and preserving. These altered patterns of food storage, affected shopping habits and meal planning." (Luxton 1980 pp.136-137).

By concentrating the heat source within the appliance itself and allowing thermostatic regulation, the electric (and earlier, gas) iron removed much of the effort involved in heating and lifting sad irons as well as the discomfort of ironing next to a hot range or open fire. Steam irons later removed the need to sprinkle fabric with water.

Other raw materials

Relevant here are items which serve as objects of labour in the domestic work process. These include: food, clothing, bedding and other household linens, furniture and furnishings. All have been much affected by new methods and innovations in capitalist production, distribution and marketing too numerous to discuss here. A study of these developments would require an analysis of each branch of industry involved as well as the overall development and expansion of production in what Marx termed Department II. I can only give the briefest indication of these developments.

The mass production of food and the advancements in freezing, canning and other methods of food processing, have altered the character of household food preparation considerably. Popular accounts refer to time-saving 'fast' and 'convenience' foods, the consumption of which has certainly risen in recent years. Nevertheless cooking 'from scratch' - using raw meat, unprocessed vegetables, and other semi-processed foods - is still the primary means by which working class family meals are prepared. Some of the old cooking skills - breadmaking, preserving, pickling and so on - have certainly declined and recipes have been standardised; but a rising standard of living, which has meant both a greater quantity of food consumed and a qualitative diversification of diet, has probably also meant that the amount of time spent in food preparation has remained stable or increased rather than decreased.

Clothing and household linens are now mass produced as 'finished' items. On the one hand the family now possesses a greater volume and diversity of clothing, bedding, and soft furnishings; these are also 'changed' more frequently, increasing the supplementary labour necessary to keep them clean and in in useable condition. On the other hand, developments in chemical cleaning agents and synthetic 'easy-clean', 'drip dry' fabrics make washing, drying, and ironing less time consuming and even eliminate some chores.

2. Technology and Domestic Labour-Time

Has the transformation in the domestic means of production outlined above resulted in a reduction in domestic labour-time? There are two ways of attempting to answer this. The first is to consider that there are really two questions here: i) has there been any overall reduction in domestic labour-time in the course of the 20th century, irrespective of possible causes? ii) if there has, can this be attributed to developments in household technology? If the answer to the first question is no, then clearly the proposition that household technology has reduced domestic labour-time is disproven in advance. The second approach involves studying the direct impact of household technology (or elements of it) on domestic labour-time, for example, comparing the labour-time of owners and non-owners of particular appliances. I shall discuss both approaches in turn.

The time-use studies already referred to provide much of the evidence concerning overall change in 20th century domestic labour-time.(4) Studies measuring time expended in household labour have been carried out since the early part of the century, particularly in the United States, Canada, and some European countries (especially France and Scandinavia) with varying degrees of methodological and statistical sophistication.(5) British data are limited, the sources being as follows:

> "In Britain the BBC's Audience Research Department has carried out national time-use studies since the 1930s, and their 1961 and 1974/5 surveys have now been recoded for comparability with each other and the American and multinational studies. A survey carried out for the Countryside Commission for Scotland in 1981 was similarly designed and coded, as was a major survey funded by the ESRC in 1983/4, the results of which are not available at the time of writing." (Thomas and Zmroczek 1985 pp.106-107).

Early surveys in the 1920s and 1930s in the United States, as well as a few in Britain,(6) were localised and small-scale; it is only since the 1960s that large-scale national and international survey data has become available. Most surveys measure women's household labour-time, although what is classified as 'household labour' differs greatly. Very few attempt to measure total domestic labour-time expended by all members of a single family/household unit, including labour-time expended outside the home in tasks such as shopping. As anthropologist Wanda Minge-Klevena has pointed out, this reflects a narrowly conceived notion of domestic labour which is defined with reference to the socially accepted

identification of 'housework and childcare' with women's work:

> "In these studies, in contrast to those of agrarian societies, the family is not the unit of labour. Instead individuals are studied; 'family labour' is conceived of as the home-based labour of women." (Minge-Klevana 1980 p.282).

Nevertheless, despite these methodological and comparability caveats and taking all factors into account the fact remains that the studies consistently point to one general conclusion - that in advanced industrial capitalist societies women's domestic labour-time, and domestic labour-time in general, has <u>not</u> declined significantly in the course of this century. Thus has arisen the 'constancy of housework' thesis, which in turn dicredits the view that household technology has brought about a decline in domestic labour-time.

> "According to several comparisons of earlier and more recent studies, the average hours of women's housework have either increased overall or, at best, remained the same despite changes in household technology." (Meissner et al 1975 p.428).
>
> "Women both in and out of the labour market reported virtually the same amount of time doing housework in the 1960s as they had ten, twenty or forty years previously, when much less technology was available." (Robinson 1980 p.54).

Joann Vanek, an authority in this field, supports the constancy of housework thesis, and in a comprehensive review of American studies conducted between 1920 and 1970 calculated that over the entire period women spent an average of 53 hours per week in housework (Vanek 1978).

Moving on to the second approach, the measurement of the direct impact of household technology on domestic labour-time has been attempted in various ways utilising the time-use survey method. Longnitudinal comparisons within one country (see, for example, Vanek 1978) have been made in an attempt to reveal the secular impact of the introduction of new household technology. Cross-cultural studies (see, for example, Szalai 1972) have been used to compare household labour-time in countries with relatively high and low diffusions of household technology. Thirdly, within countries or regions, comparisons have been made between the owners and non-owners of appliances and other domestic means of production. What have such studies revealed? Reviewing the findings of several surveys Robinson concludes:

> "Results of these studies challenged the characterisation of technology shrinking the demands of housework. Morgan et al (1966) found families with more automatic home appliances estimating more hours of housework than those with fewer appliances, particularly in families with pre-school children and two or more appliances. Robinson et al found employed women in the United States with much higher ownership of appliances spending only about four fewer hours per week on housework than employed women in Yugoslavia or Poland, and more time doing housework than employed women in Bulgaria or Peru." (Robinson, 1980 p.54).

Thus it appears that the mere presence of more advanced and productive technology in a household by no means in and of itself leads to a reduction in overall domestic labour-time.

Recent time-use data from the United States and Britain has led Robinson, and Thomas and Zmroczek (1985)

to conclude that there has been a small but significant decline in domestic labour-time in both countries over the last twenty years (data relating to the 1960s and 1970s). A rapid diffusion of appliances also took place in this period, so does this technology account for the decline? Robinson rejects the technology diffusion thesis after comparing the domestic labour-time of appliance owners and non-owners. Both studies conclude that the explanation lies elsewhere, in the consideration of non-technological factors.

To summarise: from the evidence one must conclude that the relationship between technological change in the domestic means of production and household labour-time is not a directly causal one. Despite the fact that much of the household technology that has become available to the working class since 1900 has a time-saving potential, women's domestic labour-time has remained fairly constant. Why? Moving towards an explanation involves pursuing the analysis in two directions: i) the qualitative impact of household technology on the domestic labour-process, and ii) the differences between women in respect of their domestic labour-time, their employment status and their use of domestic means of production. The first issue is discussed in the remainder of this section, the second is examined in the following section.

While time-use studies tell us something about the impact of technology on household labour-time, they are of limited use because they deal only with the

quantitative aspects of the interaction between technology and the labour process. While the presence of domestic electrical appliances and other advanced means of production in the home does not in and of itself lead to a reduction in labour-time, such technology has had a considerable impact on the content and organisation of housework and has eliminated much of the drudgery and heavy physical toil involved. For qualitative analyses of the relationship between domestic labour and household technology it is possible to turn to the work of Ruth Schwartz Cowan (1974, 1976, 1983), Susan Strasser (1980(a), 1980(b)) Joann Vanek (1980), Meg Luxton (1980), and Caroline Davidson (1982) who have pioneered research in this field. Their work is widely available and it is only necessary to make a few points here.

First, one can note the uneven and combined development of household labour, stemming from its continued unsocialised character - its small-scale, isolated and relatively unspecialised nature under general dominance of advanced industrial capitalism. Primitive methods such as sweeping with a broom, washing the floor on the knees with bucket and cloth, coexist with modern means of production like vacuum cleaners, fully automatic washing machines and other appliances which are increasingly microprocessor controlled. Technologically advanced appliances are designed and adapted as use-values to the confines of miniscule household production units and hence do not render obsolete all, or many, of the older means of production and methods. Luxton develops

this point:

> "The housewife buys domestic technology for household use. In addition, the household is mechanised only in specific areas, particularly in those involving heavy labour. Material handling processes (for example, carrying the laundry to the washing machine, placing it in the dryer and then carrying it upstairs again) are not. The housewife must still do the transporting. No work process has developed that is completely mechanised from start to finish. Housework remains fragmented, with the labour of the housewife as the integrating component." (Luxton 1980 p.130)

Secondly, the degree of mechanisation has introduced the possibility of rationalisation and organisational flexibility into the domestic labour process. Nineteenth and early 20th century domestic scientists and home economists laid down strict work schedules which may have over-emphasised the rigidity of the domestic work week, but nonetheless reflected material conditions which required a certain order and combination of tasks, in short, a plan. For example, in the early 20th century Canadian context:

> "The work week began on Monday, which was usually washday. Tuesday was devoted to ironing and putting away clothes and linens. Wednesday was baking day, and Thursday was a day for sorting and mending clothes and linen. Friday was for washing floors, checking food supplies and preparing for the weekend. Saturday and Sunday were days during which most household members were at home and friends dropped in to visit. Thus, housework during the week concentrated on the material needs of the household members. On the weekend housework centred on their social needs." (Luxton 1980 p.119)

Technological change has begun to dissolve this rigidity of housework routine to some degree; with an automatic washing machine and tumble dryer the laundry can be done

at any time, regardless also of weather conditions; refrigerators and freezers introduce flexibility into shopping and provisioning plans.

Thirdly, some developments in domestic technology have lead to the complete elimination of tasks. In particular, the provision of piped water supplies, gas and electicity has eliminated nearly all the tasks associated with fetching, carrying, heating, and disposing of water, fetching fuel, setting and maintaining fires, cleaning grates and ranges, as well as reducing household cleaning necessitated by coal dust and soot.

Fourthly, while some tasks and skills have been removed, new technology related tasks have been introduced into the home and new skills had to be developed by the domestic labourer. Appliances have to be selected and purchased, maintained and repaired, which requires extensive contact and communication with retailers, maintenance engineers and so on (Thomas and Zmroczeck 1985, Robinson 1980). It could be argued that the non-manual 'managerial' domestic tasks - budgeting, managing household finances, dealing with banks, building societies, insurance companies, state welfare agencies, shops and retailers, as well as the flexible planning of the domestic labour process itself - have become more complex and demanding. Nevertheless, as Mrs Pember Reeves pointed out in her 1913 study, Round About a Pound a Week, working class women in Britain demonstrated considerable managerial skills in keeping a family alive on such a small sum. The spread of car ownership, continuing

suburbanisation, increasing distances between the home, workplace, school, and shopping centre have expanded the domestic tasks associated with private transport provision. This has been associated with an expansion in the number of women motor vehicle drivers and their acquisition of attendant skills.

Thus, whatever it's direct relationship to domestic labour-time, new household technology has certainly changed the domestic labour-process in a number of ways. New, less physically demanding tasks have replaced some of the old ones; flexibility has been intoduced into the domestic work process. As we shall see further on, these factors can have an important indirect bearing on domestic labour-time, indirect because it depends on how the domestic labourer uses the means of production - to what ends they are applied.

3. Domestic Labour-Time and Women's Employment

If women in general spend approximately the same number of hours in household labour today as did their grandmothers, time-use studies have also demonstrated that beneath the bare arithmetical average (woman hours per week) lies a major division between employed and non-employed women. The surveys have consistently revealed that employed women, both full and part-time workers, spend significantly fewer hours in domestic labour than full-time housewives. Women's employment status is the key independent variable associated with domestic labour-time.

In quantitative terms, the surveys have shown that employed women (usually defined as those working 15 hours or more per week) usually spend between 35 to 50 per cent less time in household labour than full-time housewives - the equivalent of about 2 to 4 hours per day. It follows from the discussion so far that this disparity cannot be explained by the mere presence or absence of modern household technology. We can reject the scenario that during the course of this century first domestic technology reduced household labour-time and therefore women could utilise the spare time so created either to seek paid employment or 'waste time' in trivial and unnecessary housework pursuits as rather helpless victims of Parkinson's law. As I noted earlier, it is just such a scenario that is implicitly or explicitly accepted by several Marxist and non-Marxist social scientists, as well as by many popular media writers.

In fact there are a number of non-technological explanations or, rather, hypotheses that could be explored, these are:

i) Non-employed and employed women tend to be at different stages in the life-cycle and as a consequence have differential domestic work-loads. Full-time housewives tend to be married women with young children who because of their family composition have a greater household work-load than single, childless, or older married women with non-dependent children.

ii) When women are employed their male partners take on greater responsibility for domestic labour resulting in a more even sexual division of labour in the home.

iii) Non-employed and employed women utilise household technology in different ways, to achieve different ends. Employed women use household technology to reduce domestic labour- time (relatively and/or absolutely), that is, they exploit its time-saving potential. This may or may not involve an increase in the intensity of household labour when it is performed. They use their wages not as 'pin money' but to purchase services, superior quality directly consumable commodities, and to purchase superior domestic means of production.

iv) Employed and non-employed women adopt different domestic 'standards' and priorities. The latter use household technology to raise standards and increase labour productivity, but also spend more time in elaborating certain tasks like food provision (home baking, meals made from raw - perhaps home grown - materials, and so on). Employed women prioritise certain essential tasks and do the bare minimum - bed linens are not changed so frequently, household cleaning is not done so regularly, and so forth.

v) Employed women do their housework more efficiently, for example, planning one large weekly shopping instead of making several visits to the shops during the course of a

week.

Only one of these hypotheses can be unequivocally rejected from the outset: the second. There has been no fundamental change in the sexual division of labour within the home as we shall see further on.

Family composition is undoubtedly a major factor associated with both women's domestic labour-time and women's employment patterns (i.e. marital status, number and age of children, especially the age of the youngest child, household composition in general). In her New York/Syracuse study Kathryn Walker found:

> "The average time used for household work by all homemakers in the 1296 families in the sample was about 7 hours per day; the average for families with no children dropped to 5 hours. The average time used was about 7 hours per day in families with 1 child, about 8 hours in families with 2, 3 and 4 children, and about 9 hours in families with 5 or more children... The average time varied from 9.3 hours for homemakers if the age of the youngest child was under 1 to only 6 hours if the youngest child was 12 to 17 years of age." (Walker 1969 pp.622-623).

She concludes:

> "Probably, the reduced homemaking time for women in the labour force does reflect more effective time use and a tendency to eliminate some household work, but it probably reflects even more the fact that many homemakers work for pay when the household load is relatively small." (Walker 1969 p.624).

However, some studies have shown that even when family composition factors are controlled, employed married women still spend significantly less time in household labour than full-time housewives (Szalai 1972, Vanek 1978). Nor have other factors related to women's employment status

(education, husband's income, total family income, age) been shown to explain the household labour-time divergence.

The second hypothesis, that working women do less housework because their husbands do more, finds expression in several sociological studies on family and conjugal relations (see for example Blood and Wolfe 1960, Young and Willmott 1962). The division of household labour between spouses, it is argued, has become more equal, more symmetrical, especially where wives are employed. However, some time-use researchers have specifically investigated the sexual division of labour in the home and found little or no evidence that it has become more equal (Meissner et al 1975, Vanek 1980, Walker and Gauger 1973, Close and Collins 1983, 1985). Empirical research has confirmed what Feminists and Marxists have often asserted - that married women who become wage-labourers thereby fall under a double burden of labour because their husbands do not shoulder an equal responsibility for household labour, and of course even if they did this would only distribute this double burden differently among the members of the working class. Reviewing the findings, Vanek notes:

> "As it turns out, housework is still divided along traditional lines and is not reallocated when wives enter the labour force. In other words, the allocation of work in the home contibues to be shaped by deeply ingrained ideas about the roles of the sexes." (Vanek 1980 p.276).

This is not to say that men, as well as children, do not perform any household labour. Rather, a

quite rigid sexual division of labour allocates men particular tasks, typically: garden/outdoor work, home repairs, car maintenance, certain shopping tasks, travel on household errands, some washing-up and childcare tasks. However, the male contribution to domestic labour is usually found to be small, selective, peripheral and quantitatively inflexible despite large variations in household demands associated with family composition and women's employment status. In Walker's study (1969, 1973), husbands averaged about 1.5 hours household labour per day whether or not their wives were employed. Thus Robinson concludes:

> "There also seems to be a limit (about 20 per cent of that reported by women) that men devote to housework, such that it does not increase significantly when their wives take on employment or have additional childcare responsibilities, or where technology is available." (Robinson 1980 p.55).

In a recent British study, Close and Collins (1983) investigated the sexual division of domestic tasks between couples in the North East of England. Table 1 reproduces their findings (unfortunately no distinction is made between employed and non-employed wives).

Close and Collins drew an important distinction between the degree to which men 'do' tasks, and the degree to which they take responsibility for them:

> "Whereas men as husbands and fathers may do quite a lot of domestic labour, women as wives and mothers do

Table 1

Degree of Participation by Husbands and Wives in Use Value Production and Services

	Activity	Wife Usually %	Share %	Husband Usually %	Job not Done %
1.	Use value production (N=338)				
	Cooking	70	28	2	-
	Ironing	88	10	2	-
	Cleaning kitchen	58	40	2	-
	Vacuum	57	39	4	-
	Decorating	14	48	30	8
	House repairs	1	4	55	40
	Car maintenance	1	2	53	44
2.	Services (N=120)				
	Nurse sick child	64	33	3	-
	Child to doctor	56	44	0	-
	Up in night for child	43	50	7	-

Source: Close and Collins 1983 p.39.

> more and take by far the major share of being responsible for making sure that in some way and by someone domestic labour is carried out and completed. Men's participation in domestic labour tends to be confined to doing tasks as a way of "helping" women meet their responsibility for them." (Close and Collins 1983 p.45).

Time-use studies also show that when <u>total work weeks</u> (combined paid and domestic labour-time) are calculated, employed married women have longer work weeks than either employed men or full-time housewives (Vanek 1980, Szalai 1972, Walker 1969, Meissner et al 1975). In a cross-cultural study involving twelve countries, including the United States, Peru and Bulgaria, Robinson et al concluded:

> "...when the times spent on the two types of work are summed together, the working woman is much busier than either her male colleague or her housewife counterpart. After her day's obligations are done, she finds herself with an hour or two less time than anyone else, and this pattern again appears 'universally' at all our survey sites." (Robinson et al 1972 p.119).

Thus the difference between the domestic labour-time of employed and non-employed women cannot be explained by a different sexual division of labour in single and dual-earner households. On the contrary, that sexual division of labour continues to operate particularly powerfully to the detriment of employed women.

Although I have established that family composition factors (i.e. differential domestic work-loads) account in part for the fact that employed women spend less time in household labour than full-time housewives, one of the fundamental questions that is posed

is not why employed women have less housework to perform, but how they manage to reduce domestic labour-time given the objective and imperative household demands. The fact that the unequal sexual division of labour in the home persists irrespective of women's employment status, so that employed women take on a 'double shift', indicates that they must of necessity reduce domestic labour-time, but how?

This question leads into the ambit of the third, fourth and fifth hypotheses. Unfortunately, there is little direct empirical evidence relating to employed women's coping strategies, but the time-use studies and other research suggests that all the options or 'solutions' mentioned in these hypotheses may play some part, singly and in combination.

Hypotheses three and four contain an important idea about the relationship between technology, or the domestic means of production, and domestic labour-time: women can use household technology either to reduce labour-time or to increase it. I would suggest that employed women reduce their domestic labour-time by utilising modern appliances and other domestic means of production specifically for that purpose. I have established that the mere ownership of household technology does not directly, or automatically, lead to a reduction in domestic labour-time. Nevertheless, much household technology possesses time-saving potential which can be exploited under certain conditions. It all depends on how the technology is used, to what ends it is applied,

and the material conditions which determine both the utilisation of the means and the nature of the ends. Employed women are placed in material conditions which induce them to attempt to exploit this time-saving potential. The fact that domestic means of production can be utilised so as to increase or decrease domestic labour-time is conditioned by the nature of the social relations of production within which this utilisation occurs, this labour is performed. This important point is dealt with more fully in the next, concluding, section.

Most studies fail to distinguish between full-time and part-time women workers. However, the British national data, referred to earlier, does make this distinction (see Table 2).

As one would expect, Table 2 shows that the amount of time part-time employed women spend in domestic labour stands approximately mid-way between that of full-time employed women and full-time housewives. It also shows that employed women spend less time in irregular, routine and non-routine tasks as well as in childcare which in part reflects differences in marital status and family composition. Robinson et al (1972) also found that employed married women reduce time spent on central components of domestic labour, and that such their domestic labour-time has an inelastic character,

> "...as though the employed woman is only able to do what she sees as the barest minimum of the necessary chores in any event, and if larger numbers of children create demand there is little response possible save to cut more corners and do the same things faster. Most striking of all are the work

Table 2

Women's Paid and Non-Paid Work Times: UK 1974/5 (minutes per day*)

	Employed full-time (n=392)**	Employed part-time (n=293)	Not Employed (n=487)
	mins.	mins.	mins.
Paid work	371	159	-
Domestic work	151	303	380
Total	521	462	382
Routine domestic work			
Cooking/washing up	56	114	131
Cleaning/washing	43	88	111
Shopping	23	38	45
Childcare	4	18	40
Non-routine domestic work			
Odd jobs/decorating	9	14	16
Gardening	2	4	6
Domestic travel	6	13	14
Knitting and sewing	8	14	18

Source: Thomas and Zmroczek 1985 p.113

* i.e. number of minutes per week divided by seven
** Over 30 hours = 'full-time'. Less than 5 hours paid work per week = not employed.

> patterns that appear across all sites for employed women at weekends... The employed woman... just about doubles the amount of time spent on housework on her days off from work: clearly she must use them to catch up on these obligations, rather than profit from them for rest and recuperation." (Robinson et al 1972 p.121).

Meissner et al similarly found that the weekends are used for bridging the domestic gap:

> "In an item by item comparison, the weekend record suggests that women with paid work revert to the full level of housework of jobless housewives. In house-cleaning particularly, they make up for lost time and spend virtually as much time as unpaid housewives do during the week." (Meissner et al 1975 p.433).

One condition of this weekend reorganisation and intensification of domestic labour around the weekend or other 'days off' is flexibility in the labour process. As noted earlier, such flexibility has been one consequence of the development of household technology in this century; the rigidity of the 19th and early 20th century domestic work week has been broken down to a considerable degree. It also seems that when employed women set about their domestic tasks, they work more intensively, concentrating more labour into a morning's work than would an average full-time housewife.

There is some evidence to suggest that employed women adopt lower 'standards' in the performance and products of domestic labour. In a small-scale study of North Staffordshire married couples, Pauline Hunt noted of employed women:

> "Not every item of linen and clothing will now be

> ironed; untidy draws will stay untidy, rooms will not be hoovered every day and convenience foods will become more prominent." (Hunt 1978 p.566).

On the other hand if the woman's wage raises the family income to a significant degree this may facilitate the purchase of higher quality, more finished, items for consumption. However, Hunt's example of convenience foods should warn against any simple equation here. Such 'value-added' products are expensive, that is the whole point from the angle of capitalist production, but by no means necessarily of higher utility or quality compared with products that require more finishing - more labour in the home.

Thus, by a combination of strategies, as Meissner et al have pointed out, employed women: "...manage to compress the necessities of the regular housework of the entire week by more than 13 hours." (Meissner et al 1975 p.436). They are able to cut down household labour-time by adopting strategies which include utilising the time-saving potential of particular domestic means of production, substituting some domestic labour-tasks with material commodities and services bought with wages, cutting down necessary labour tasks in the home to a minimum, compromising on standards, labouring more intensively at weekends and on other 'days off', perhaps expending labour-power in a more efficient tightly planned manner, and so on. Much more research is necessary to establish the precise weight of these, and perhaps other, factors. What can be said with certainty is that the relationship between household technology and women's

employment is not a directly causal one. The view that domestic technology reduces domestic labour-time so releasing women for employment as wage-labourers is unfounded. The relationship is an indirect one mediated by a complex of social, cultural and technological factors.

4. The Constancy of Domestic Labour-Time

Having discussed the disparity between the time spent in the performance of household labour by employed and non-employed women it is now possible to return to, and throw more light upon, the 'constancy of housework' thesis. We have seen that, despite the growing proportion of employed women in the 20th century, there has been no significant overall reduction in domestic labour-time when the hours of household labour performed by all women are averaged (Vanek 1978, 1980). This suggests that despite the fact that employed women adopt strategies to bring about a relative restriction of domestic labour-time, this is nonetheless not an attempt to reduce this time to the barest minimum but rather an attempt to optimise it and its useful effects. Indeed the overall constancy of domestic labour-time in these circumstances signifies a general underlying trend among working class women to maintain and even increase domestic labour-time as and when objective circumstances permit. Why should they do this? My own explanation is as follows; it flows from the analysis of the historical development of domestic labour presented in the previous chapter.

If domestic technology possesses the potential to reduce domestic labour-time, viewed in a purely technical and abstract fashion, women have not generally utilised it to achieve this goal, or do so only under particular conditions and in particular ways. Instead, working class women have employed their domestic means of production to do two things: i) improve the quality of both the products of domestic labour and of domestic services, i.e. of the useful effects of their labour; ii) raise the productivity of domestic labour, thereby producing a greater quantity of use-values, of useful effects, in a given time. Time has not been saved through the pursuit of these ends but working class living standards have been continuously raised. The domestic means of production have been utilised to improve the material conditions of life - to improve the home environment, bodily cleanliness and physical health, to enrich the individual consumption of the working class in all aspects of life's necessities: food, clothing, shelter, warmth, rest. Thus the working class continues to raise the quality of life through domestic labour. In the previous chapter I discussed how this trend manifested itself in the form of the struggle for domestic labour-time and elementary means of production to ensure the basic reproduction of human life in the 19th century. In this century the issue has become not so much a struggle for the time and conditions necessary for the basic reproduction of life, but a struggle for higher wages in order to secure progressively more and superior direct

subsistence goods and domestic means of production accompanied by the utilisation of these means of production for the reproduction of labour-power on a higher level. This is not a surprising phenomenon - it is simply an expression of the drive of the exploited class to improve the material conditions of life through labour for themselves.

However, once again the results are contradictory for working class women. In the last chapter I discussed the conflict of interests embodied in the housewife role originating in the class and sexual oppression of working class women. This conflict of interests persists. On the one hand, as the primary domestic labourers within the family, it is women who have wielded household technology to optimise the fruits of domestic production for their families and themselves, whether they are employed or not. On the other hand, precisely because they are primarily housewives and mothers, working class women continue to experience greater inequality, greater exploitation, and greater oppression in other spheres of social life.

Once again this analysis brings me into disagreement with Hartmann whose interpretation of the constancy of women's domestic labour-time is fundamentally different:

> "Their [men's] control of women's labour-power is the lever that allows men to benefit from women's provision of personal and household services." (Hartmann 1981 p.372).

Thus:

> "...time spent in housework, as well as other indicators of household labour, can be fruitfully used as a measure of power relations in the home." (Hartmann 1981 p.377).

It is not necessary to repeat my criticisms of Hartmann's general approach to domestic labour. Certainly, the data reviewed here does show that working class men have benefited from the constancy or even extension of more efficient domestic labour without contributing greatly to it themselves. However, it is doubtful whether patriarchy can account for the constancy of women's domestic labour-time. Surely, as victims of patriarchy, women would have utilised the time-saving potential of some household technology to reduce domestic labour-time as a weapon against male oppression, instead of using it to raise living standards and increase output? Surely men could not have compelled women to follow the latter course? The essence of Hartmann's conception of patriarchy is precisely the notion that men have control over women's labour-power. The active role of women in determining an aspect of social development through their domestic labour is denied. The fact that women do this within the confines of a role determining their specific oppression is a contradiction, but no more of a contradiction than the fact that the class of wage-workers as a whole are oppressed and exploited but nonetheless constitute the indispensable active, living component of the productive forces which that class develops under capitalism.

I have stated several times that the mere ownership of household technology does not, per se, bring about changes in domestic labour-time. Technology's impact on the time spent in household labour depends on the manner in which it is utilised. In general, it has been utilised within the working class household not to minimise household production, but to increase domestic productivity and raise the quality of the domestic product - of both the immediate use values produced and the end product, the commodity labour-power. As a form of production which uniquely fuses production for subsistence with the production of a specific commodity - labour-power - domestic labour has, on the one hand, improved the quality and quantity of material and immaterial products for immediate use within the household, and on the other, has improved the quality of the commodity labour-power: children as potential, and adults as actual wage-labourers, are now healthier and live longer than at any other time. Of course, this is not solely the achievement of domestic labour, but of a combination kinds of social, cultural and environmental changes. Nevertheless, household labour continues to play a central role in determining the quality (use-value) of the commodity labour-power, as well as, of course, its value.

The ends to which means of production are applied depends on the social relations of production within which labour is carried on. Within wage-labour relations the means of production are applied by their owners and controllers to increase the rate of

exploitation and by that means the mass and rate of profit. Within the working class family the means of production are applied by their owners and controllers to improve the material conditions of life. Within the former relations, the means of production are in the hands of an exploiting class. Within the latter, an extremely limited proportion of society's means of production are in the hands of the exploited class who utilise them, as far as is possible, for their own requirements. Of course, these two spheres cannot be insulated from one another, the capitalist mode of production dominates and determines much in the domestic sphere. The latter is itself therefore inevitably riven by social contradictions and oppressive relations, primarily the oppression of women. Nonetheless it is mistaken to see only the oppressive side of the working class family. The strand of Marxism quoted at the beginning of this chapter, as represented by Mandel and Braverman, who argue that the working class family has already ceased to be a fundamental unit of production under capitalism, tend toward the opposite mistake. They see only the tendency for domestic labour to be socialised under capitalism and treat this tendency as though it is an accomplished fact. They do not see the fundamental contradictions operating through this tendency which actually pull in the opposite direction. On this theoretical foundation they are bound to underestimate the oppression of working class women under capitalism because they assert that the real basis of that oppression has already fundamentally disappeared.

To conclude: as was the case in the 19th century, the development of domestic labour in this century owes much to the continuing struggle (albeit in a different form) of the working class, but particularly working class women, to use household production as a means of improving the material conditions of life. It is this which, fundamentally, explains the constancy of domestic labour-time despite the 'technological revolution' in the home. Although employed women spend significantly fewer hours in domestic labour than full-time housewives, all women appear to seek to maximise household production within the time available rather than to minimise domestic labour-time and the burden of tasks allocated to them.

CHAPTER SEVEN

DOMESTIC LABOUR: THE INTER-WAR YEARS

In this chapter I will examine some of the features of working class household production in Britain in the period circa 1918 to 1939, concentrating particularly on the nature of the domestic means of production, the material conditions of labour, and some of the distinct labour tasks making up the household labour process.

In the previous two chapters the development of domestic labour was considered within a century-long perspective which precluded a detailed examination of day-to-day domestic labour tasks at particular historical junctures. The intention is to counterbalance this general approach by focusing on the particularities of domestic labour, or more specifically women's household labour, in a relatively short historical period. Why chose the inter-war years? There are a number of features which make this a period of special interest. First, the proportion of married women in the labour force remained very low throughout, at a level little changed from that of the years preceding the First World War (see Table 3). This was the 'age' par excellence - one can hardly call it the 'golden age' - of the full-time working class housewife in Britain, an age which was brought to an end during the Second World War. Ideology and social practice were

synchronised: a married woman's place was very definitely in the home.(1)

Second, it was during this period that a number of important developments occured which were to have a very significant impact upon working class household production, that is, on the content of the labour process rather than on domestic labour-time: the spread of domestic gas and electricity supplies; the continued spread of piped water supplies; the implementation of a programme of municipal housebuilding; the invention and increased marketing of domestic appliances. These developments laid the basis, and marked the beginning, of the 'technological revolution' in the home.

Finally, there exists a surprisingly large amount of directly relevant contemporary literature relating to this period, thanks largely to the research and campaigning conducted under the auspices of the Women's Co-operative Guild, the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, the Fabian Women's Group, the Women's Industrial Council, and other similar organisations.(2) It is probably true to say that working class women have not been under closer scrutiny before or since. If this information is used in conjunction with the slightly later Political and Economic Planning (P.E.P) study, The Market for Household Appliances (1945), and the Mass Observation survey, Peoples' Homes (1943), a fairly detailed picture of the inter-war (as well as, to a certain degree, the war-time) domestic labour process can be constructed.

Table 3

Labour Force Participation Rates in Britain by Sex and Marital Status, 1901-1951

	1901	1911	1921	1931	1951
Total females (over 10 years)	31.8	32.3	32.3	34.2	34.7
Married females (over 10 years)	-	9.6	8.7	10.0	21.7
Other females (over 10 years)	-	-	53.8	60.2	55.0

Source: Joseph 1983 pp.126-127

1. The Domestic Means of Production

The domestic supply of piped water, gas, and electricity, along with the installation of household water heating systems, introduced qualitative changes into the household labour process. Britain, the first industrial nation, lagged behind the United States in the speed with which these basic utilities, and the instruments of labour associated with them (vacuum cleaners, fridges, cookers, washing machines, and so on), ceased to be luxury items available only to the very wealthy minority, and became essential means of working class consumption, so raising the average material conditions of life of that class.(3) As late as 1942, the Heating of Dwellings Inquiry found that three quarters of the 5,000 working class households surveyed did not have a supply of hot running water: in 31 per cent of households water for laundering was heated in a copper, in 28 per cent a gas boiler was used, while in 16 per cent water was still heated in pans or kettles on a stove or over a kitchen fire (Davidson 1982). The 1961 Census revealed that 22 per cent of the population remained in accommodation lacking a hot water tap.

It was not until the post-war period that the rapid diffusion of household utilities and electro-mechanical domestic appliances occurred in Britain. Nevertheless it was during the pre-1939 period that a domestic technological revolution actually began in the household, even if its practical results were felt

predominantly in the households of the better off. If working class domestic labour was not completely transformed in practice by this technological revolution, or rather by its beginnings, nonetheless the luxury items possessed by the middle classes and a strata of the labour aristocracy certainly began to revolutionise the consciousness of the working class, and particularly of the working class wife, in the area of social aspirations. The extensive and intensive growth of various communication media as the bearers of a greatly expanded advertising drive by the large capitalist producers of these items certainly played a very important role here. The period under discussion therefore also prefigures the post-war years when the private sphere of the family is increasingly deeply penetrated by communications media which themselves take the form of electrical apparatus in the home: before 1939 the wireless, after 1939, television.

The domestic supply of electricity obviously laid the basic foundation for this media revolution as well as much else, and it is appropriate to begin with the spread of this important energy source, together with gas.

Gas and electricity: supplies and appliances

The gas producing industry was established in the early 19th century, but domestic gas lighting was only introduced in the 1870s and little attention was paid to the innovation and application of gas technology for the purposes of domestic cooking and heating until the 1880s.

In the early decades of this century the domestic supply of gas became fairly widespread in urban areas. Its relative cheapness and the 'penny in the slot' payment system made it financially accessible to a large proportion of working class households, if only for occasional use. By 1939 the gas industry estimated that 65 per cent of its sales were domestic and by 1949, 79 per cent of British households had a gas supply. Compared with electricity the utilisation and potential of gas in household labour was, and remains, relatively limited in scope. In the period under discussion it was used mainly for cooking, but also for lighting, space heating, and water heating (gas coppers). The only other gas run appliance developed after the 1890s was the refrigerator (Forty 1975). In the inter-war years it was quite common for a working class family to possess a hired gas cooker, but it was generally utilised as a supplementary cooking appliance co-existing with a coal range. It is estimated that by 1939 there were between eight and nine million gas cookers in Britain and that three quarters of all families had one (Davidson 1982).

Electricity supply had far more revolutionary implications for household labour and the domestic environment. A distinction has to be drawn, however, between the domestic supply of electricity and the exploitation of its potential for transforming the domestic labour process. The domestic application of electricity is almost entirely a product of the 20th century. However, for the first twenty years the spread of

supplies was very slow. By the end of the First World War only six per cent of British homes (about half a million) were wired; by 1921 the proportion had doubled, and by 1939 it was 65 per cent (see Table 4). With the establishment of the Central Electricity Generating Board and the National Grid following the Electricity (Supply) Act of 1926, the generation of electricity was standardised, its distribution rationalised, and as a result, its unit costs cheapened. During the 1930s household wiring proceeded apace, about half of the then existing British homes were first supplied during the decade and unit costs fell most markedly in these years:

> "The cost of installing a modest lighting system dropped from a maximum of £20 in 1919 to about £6 in the 1930s, and between 1921 and 1939, the average price of a kWh of electricity consumed for lighting and other domestic purposes fell from 5.75d to 1.57d." (Davidson 1982 p.38).

Although the transforming potential of electricity in the home was perceived in the pre-1914 and early inter-war years, its use in heating, cooking, cleaning, and laundering was restricted to those wired households wealthy enough to afford the extremely expensive domestic electrical appliances then available.(4) The servant employing class was quick to grasp the advantages of electricity even if it was viewed somewhat over-optimistically:

> "Electricity... makes a most valuable servant when put to do useful work. In its capacity as a servant, it is always at hand; always willing do to its allotted task and do it perfectly silently, swiftly

Table 4

Households Wired for Electricity, 1921-1961

Number of Households in the United Kingdom

	Total Households	Wired for Electricity	% of Total Wired for Electricity
	(millions)	(millions)	
1921	9.4	1.1	12
1931	10.9	3.5	32
1938	13.3 (1939)	8.7	65
1951	14.2	12.2	86
1961	16.7	16	96

Source: Corley 1966 p.19

> and without mess; never wants a day off, never answers back, is never laid up, never asks for a rise; in fact it is often willing to do more work for less money; never gives notice and does not mind working overtime; it has no prejudices and is prepared to undertake any duties for which it is adapted; it costs nothing when it is not actually doing useful work. Such are the merits of the housewife's new ally." (M. Lancaster Electric Cooking, Heating, Cleaning etc., being a Manual of Electricity in the Service of the Home, London 1914: cited in Forty 1975 p.8).

In the majority of wired households during the 1920s and 1930s, the use of electricity was restricted to lighting (which was rapidly replacing gas for this purpose), ironing, and occasional space heating. Pre-1914 homes were generally only wired for lighting, and even in houses built after 1930 it was uncommon to find more than three 15 amp and three 5 amp sockets (Forty 1975). Unfortunately, statistics relating to the ownership and installation of electrical appliances were not systematically collected in Britain until after the Second World War. There was certainly a growth in demand for appliances in the 1930s as electricity supplies spread and credit facilities in the form of hire purchase were extended to wider strata of the population. However, the market remained largely upper and middle class until after 1945. Between 1930 and 1935 the number of electric cookers sold trebled from aproximately 75,000 to 240,000 per annum. The larger gas appliance firms, considerably alarmed, retaliated, organising advertising campaigns for their own cookers which contributed to a levelling out of electric cooker sales. By 1938 total electric cookers in use numbered about 1.3 millions, compared with 8.5 to 9

million gas cookers (Corley 1966).

Appliances such as refrigerators and vacuum cleaners sold on much smaller scale than cookers in the inter-war years; by 1939 there were only about 220,000 electric and approximately 90,000 gas refrigerators in use. In the same year 400,000 vacuum cleaners were sold, mostly by door-to-door salesmen. Electric washing machines sold in smaller numbers, about 60,000 in 1939 (see Table 5).

Although the extension of hire purchase was to play an extremely important role in enabling working class households to obtain appliances in the post-war period, in the inter-war years only an extremely small proportion of better off working class families could afford even one or two of the electro-mechanical varieties:

> "The Ministry of Labour inquiry into working class expenditure in 1937/1938 showed that the amount spent before the war on household appliances was very small." (P.E.P. 1945 p.xii).
>
> "Before the war, many of the most useful and labour-saving devices were beyond the reach of the family with an income of less than about £160 per annum, and expensive appliances, such as refrigerators and electric washing machines, were at 1939 prices, available only to families with a relatively high income. It is, however, significant that in the case of washing machines, several families of the poorer class would often co-operate to buy such an appliance on hire purchase, indicating that its value was fully appreciated, and suggesting that sales would probably be considerable if the price could be reduced." (P.E.P. 1945 p.22).

Table 5

Percentage of Households Wired for Electricity Owning Various Appliances, 1938

Refrigerators (gas and electric)	3
Washing Machines	4
Vacuum Cleaners	27
Cookers (electric)	18

(computed from trade estimates of total appliances in use)

Source: Corley 1966 p.16.

Housing and the domestic environment

Between 1901 and 1937, the population of the British Isles increased from almost 37 million to 46 million, the rate of increase falling markedly in the 1920s and 1930s. During the latter two decades the number of houses built increased rapidly until the outbreak of war. Nevertheless, the increase in the number of separate family units outstripped the supply of new housing so that the housing shortage actually worsened between 1921 and 1931 (Gittins 1982).

Table 6

Houses Built, Great Britain: 5 year averages, 1901-1938 (thousands)

1901- 5	142.9	
1906-10	107.5	
1911-13	58.4	(3 year average)
1920-23	64.1	(4 year average)
1924-28	198.5	
1929-33	223.6	
1934-38	354.7	

Source: B.R. Mitchell and P. Dean 1962 p.239

It was not until after the First World War that the concept of state subsidised municipal housing became widely politically acceptable and even then it was

generally seen only as a temporary measure. The deterioration in housing conditions, continued chronic overcrowding, and the threat of serious post-war industrial and social unrest forced a reappraisal of housing provision by the state. In the event, the December 1918 promise of half a million homes for heroes to be constructed in the immediate future was not met; only a third of this number was built (Merrett 1979). However, both municipal and private housebuilding boomed in the years which followed. Between 1919 and 1939 over four million houses were built in England and Wales (about a quarter of the present housing stock), and over a million of these were built by local authorities. The 1920s saw the peak of municipal construction; the boom in the private sector began in the early 1930s after mortgage interest rates fell following the lowering of the bank rate, and after a reduction in building costs (Forty 1975). The houses built by private firms were sold mainly to the middle class. This increase in owner-occupation marked an important shift in tenure patterns away from private rented accommodation. Before 1914, probably not more than one in ten heads of household owned their own home; by 1939 about a quarter of householders were owner-occupiers, and for the first time a small proportion of working class families could escape the private rented sector. Ministry of Labour data for 1937 show that 18 per cent of urban insured workers (manual and non-manual workers with incomes not exceeding £250 per annum) were owner-occupiers (Merrett 1979).

The one million or more houses built by local authorities were generally leased to the better-off sections of the working class. In the late 1920s, the maximum rent most unskilled and semi-skilled workers could afford was six to seven shillings a week. As a result most council housing was out of reach because weekly rents varied from six to ten shillings, averaging at approximately eight:

> "There is really no doubt about how rent policy worked in practice. The market for local authority homes was largely confined to a limited range of income groups, that is, in practice, the better off families, the small clerks, the artisans, the better-off semi-skilled workers with small families and fairly safe jobs." (Bowley, cited in Merrett 1979 p.278).

This left the majority of unskilled and semi-skilled workers' families in housing conditions ranging from barely adequate to appalling, and subject to the tyranny of private landlords (even though rent controls were in operation). Overcrowding remained a major problem; entire families continued to live in one or two rooms, often without the most basic amenities.

Although the quantity of newly constructed housing stock available to the working class - as owners or tenants - was very small, nonetheless it was important in setting new standards for the size, number and specialisation of rooms as well as for structural and sanitary aspects of dwellings. Virtually all new houses built in the inter-war years were wired for electricity. The best council houses provided hot and cold running

water, had a separate bathroom, three bedrooms, a parlour or front room, a living room/kitchen and scullery. The 'standard' minimum three bedroomed house as recommended by the National Housing and Town Planning Council in 1929 was adopted by the Government in 1932 (Rice 1939). Forty suggests that concern at poor housing standards began with the realisation during the first decade of the century that bad housing was a major cause of ill-health. This was transformed into an interest in domestic utilities as well as the size and structural characteristics of buildings:

> "The first serious attempt to improve the standards of fittings and equipment in houses on a national scale was started in 1918 by an offshoot of the Labour Party, the Women's Labour League." (Forty 1975 p.45).

In 1922, Leonora Eyles, a feminist writer noted:

> "I wonder if it ever occurs to architects that they put labour-saving devices - rounded corners, radiators, plain skirting boards, plenty of hot water, distempered walls, tiled kitchen walls... into the wealthy houses where there is a staff of servants, not one of whom does half as much as the women in the five-roomed house in Peckham?" (L. Eyles 1922 p.125).

Margery Spring Rice's identification of three categories of working class housing during the inter-war years can be utilised as a rough guide to housing and domestic conditions in the period. In her report Working Class Wives (1939), only 7 per cent of women surveyed lived with their families in "good" or "reasonable" housing. This included:

> "Council houses or flats, the older types of villa or well-built cottage, in a healthy position and providing sufficient space for the family. If in a town there will be electric light, hot and cold water and either a small private garden or good playground for the children. Into this category may also be put those flats, not self-contained, lived in by a very small family, in a well-kept tenement house, where the main inconvenience is the lack of a private bathroom or W.C." (Rice 1939 p.131).

The bulk of her sample - 62 per cent - lived in a second category of "poor" but not "slum" housing. These families generally rented a few rooms in an old, formerly middle class house, subdivided but not properly converted, for the use of several families:

> "The house now occupied by four, five or six families is left exactly as it was when built for the occupation of one; sanitation, bathroom (if it exists at all) water supply, are all the same as were provided in 1840 for the single family; when the standards even of the rich in these respects were unhygienic and wasteful of labour, for servants could be hired very cheaply to deal with the drawbacks." (Rice 1939 p.136).

However, Rice's study was London-based and the capital undoubtedly had an over-representation of families living in subdivided houses.

The remaining 31 per cent of women and their families lived in intolerable slums, chronically overcrowded, alive with vermin and in such a bad state of repair that cleanliness was impossible to achieve.

Water supplies: hot and cold

The supply of piped water to individual households was by no means universal by the end of the Second World War, and the installation of integrated hot

water systems remained something of a luxury. Very few families in Rice's survey had exclusive use of a cold water tap. In large houses and tenements converted for the use of several families, the tap was often on the ground floor, in the street, or even further away. Without such a water supply and the necessary accompanying sanitary conveniences - particularly sinks and toilets - an enormous amount of fetching and carrying had to be done up and down stairs. No accurate statistics for the proportion of households without a water supply and sanitary conveniences were collected until the 1951 Census. Even then only 80 per cent of private households in England and Wales had their own water supply (of course, households in the rural areas were generally the last to obtain supplies); only 52 per cent of households had a kitchen sink, toilet and fixed bath; 45 per cent lacked any kind of fixed bath, 21 per cent had no toilet, and 12 per cent had no kitchen sink (Davidson 1982). As mentioned earlier, the 1961 Census was the first to enumerate the proportion of households with hot water taps. P.E.P. estimated that the number of pre-Second World War families with incomes below £300 per annum without a piped hot water supply was 64 per cent, and those with incomes below £160 per annum, 74 per cent (P.E.P. 1945 p.xxvi). Thus, for the majority of working people from 1900 to 1945, obtaining hot water was a labour intensive and time-consuming task whether or not piped cold water was available. The use of solid fuels for heating water created additional labour associated with fetching and carrying coal and so forth. Of course, a

fire in a grate or range could combine water heating, space heating and cooking functions, but the heating of large quantities of water for bathing or laundering usually required the separate lighting of a copper or set pot in the scullery.

By the end of the inter-war period the best working class houses had a water heating system providing hot water on tap, even if only a single ground floor tap existed. The water was commonly heated in a back-boiler or range boiler; very few families had the independent electric boilers found in middle class homes (P.E.P. 1945). Some working class homes had a grate or range with a boiler which provided hot water but not on tap, or a gas geyser which had the advantage over coal water heating systems in that no more water than was required could be heated, and instantaneously, so avoiding the necessity to rise early to light the fire (Forty 1975). Many families, however, continued to heat all their water in pans, kettles and other vessels on an open fire, range or cooker; a very approximate estimate is that in 1939, 25 to 35 per cent of households were still using this primitive method for heating all their water (based on the 1942 Heating of Dwellings Inquiry figures).

By the beginning of the Second World War, a hot water supply was nonetheless widely accepted as a 'basic necessity of life'. In the 1945 P.E.P. study it was stated:

> "It cannot be too strongly emphasised that lack of hot water greatly adds to the labour and time

> involved in washing clothes and dishes, and cleaning and scrubbing the house, besides acting as a deterrent to personal hygiene." (P.E.P. 1945 p.39).

Mrs Sanderson Furniss of the Women's Labour League had said much the same thing twenty-seven years earlier:

> "Hot water should be laid on in every home. All women are agreed that this is of the utmost importance, and that most of the drudgery connected with housework centres around the difficulty of obtaining hot water." (cited in Forty 175 p.49).

In the intervening period, although very slow progress was actually made, the fact that new local authority housing began to incorporate such features as integrated hot water systems and separate bathrooms (after 1919 it became a statutory requirement that households should have a bath), created new expectations and aspirations:

> "The significance of the 1920s and '30s was that baths and hot water became established as standard fixtures for new houses, and because of this it was the period in which people came to regard them as basic necessities of civilised life, though there was a considerable lag before they were installed in existing houses." (Forty 1975 p.50).

2. Domestic Tasks

Laundry

From the above it is possible to imagine some of the difficulties involved in washing clothing, bedding and other household linens. In 74 per cent of households in 1942, the housewife did all the clothes washing at home;

of households with an income of below £160 per annum, 20 per cent heated water for washing on a fire, stove or range, 35 per cent used a solid fuel copper or set pot, 25 per cent used a gas boiler (copper), and 2 per cent an electric boiler (Davidson 1982). Reviewing women's washing days, Davidson concludes:

> "Laundry was not generally affected by technological change during these three centuries [1650-1950]. The drudgery of washing was lightened to some extent during the 19th century by the spread of cheap soaps, wringers, and piped water supplies. And 'smoothing' was certainly facilitated first by the upright wringer-mangle and later by the electric iron. But the really basic problem of providing ready supplies of piped hot water had not been solved." (Davidson 1982 p.160).

Solid fuel coppers, particularly gas coppers which became widely used in the late 1920s and 1930s, made for a slight improvement on hand washing in that some items could be boiled up and stirred. However, this did not lead to the abolition of the ribbed scrubbing board, nor the necessity of lifting water and heavy wet washing. Boiling also produced an unpleasant smell and considerable quantities of heat and steam. When cooking had to be carried out in the scullery where the copper was located, the combination of smells must have been particularly nauseating. It is estimated that by the end of the inter-war years most women had some sort of wringer which was some improvement on hand wringing.

The vast majority of working class women were not introduced to mechanised home laundering until well after 1945 when electric washing machines and, later

still, automatic machines, came within their reach; there were less than 300,000 electric boilers in use in 1939 (Forty 1975). But as was pointed out in the previous chapter, laundering with a non-automatic electric washing machine still required a considerable expenditure of labour, even if not of such a physically exacting kind. This was particularly true in the case of the early models. However, it was not the failure of early invention or innovation which was the root cause of the belated diffusion of the electric washing machine. Electric motors capable of heating water and rotating or oscillating a machine's contents were available by the early 1900s (Davidson 1982). It was the absence of piped hot water and the fact that many households had not been wired for electricity before the Second World War that stymied the development of mechanised home laundering, combined with the high cost of the appliances themselves.

Those families in rooms and houses without exclusive access to a copper sometime utilised one in a shared wash-house, or downstairs scullery. But more often water would be heated in pans for hand washing. Public wash-houses, commercial laundries, and washerwomen, were not widely used by the working class. There was some debate about why this was so given availability of communal facilities in some areas and the fact that commercial services were not always prohibitively expensive. It was noted in one survey that:

> "Women between the ages of 30 and 50, i.e. those more likely to have a young family, do their own clothes

> washing more often than younger or older women, and countrywomen do so more than townswomen. When washing is sent out by families with incomes under £300 per annum, 89 per cent of it is heavy washing only." (P.E.P. 1945 p.33).

Public wash-houses existed in some places - in 1913 they were recorded to be in London, sixteen provincial English towns, and nine Scottish towns, and were most densely concentrated in Lancashire, Yorkshire and London (Davidson 1982) - but the numbers utilising them in the County of London, for example, fell by more than a third between 1928 and 1938 to below the 1914 level (P.E.P. 1945). Davidson's explanation for women's non-utilisation of these public wash-houses and commercial services is not that they were too expensive but that:

> "...the explanation is a moral one. If cleanliness was indeed next to godliness", women wanted to create that moral worth with their own hands, or if this was not feasible, at least in their own homes." (Davidson 1982 p.163).

But there were other more material reasons for this reluctance such as the lack of drying facilities at such laundries (Forty 1975), and Rice noted that sending washing to a commercial laundry was not possible if the family did not possess a change of clothes and linen and therefore could not part with them for any length of time. One commercial service that did expand during the same period, particularly in London, was the 'bag-wash' or 'wet-wash'. For a fixed charge based on weight, linen would be returned to the customer washed, but still damp and unironed. P.E.P. noted:

> "The War-time Social Survey found that 13 per cent of those sending to a laundry used the bag-wash. In the poorer London districts, where home facilities were no doubt mostly inadequate, something like 80 per cent of the population are said to use it." (P.E.P. 1945 p.34).

These illustrations lead to a very important point which forms the real basis of Davidson's "moral" explanation. Working class housewives were not only interested in reducing their own labour-time and the drudgery of home laundering, nor even in the relative cheapness of alternatives, but also in the utility of these alternatives. Domestic labour is family production consciously orientated to the production of use-values for family consumption. If women could produce cleaner, better-ironed, less damaged, clothes and linen at home then these other considerations notwithstanding, they would still launder in the old way. Of course all these factors are inter-related; un-ironed or damaged clothes requiring mending or a quicker than normal replacement could in the long run cost more in domestic labour-time and be more expensive.

So, throughout the inter-war period washing remained, for the majority of working class wives, a weekly chore, widely detested and little changed as a task or in its basic technology. The quantity of clothing and household linen possessed by the average family does not seem to have increased significantly. Fabrics and cleaning agents remained largely unchanged. Drying clothes continued to be a major problem. Women were frequently

unable to hang washing out of doors (this was sometimes actually forbidden) and were compelled to dry washing indoors on a line or clothes horse. The kitchen-sitting room was festooned weekly with wet washing adding to the frustration of washing day (Rice 1939).

The drudgery of ironing was, however, considerably lightened by the electric iron. By 1939 about 80 per cent of all houses wired for electricity had such an iron and some unwired homes had the less effective gas iron. The development of relatively cheap electric irons was made necessary by the replacement of coal ranges by gas cookers - the latter could not be used for heating sad irons. The replacement of the latter with irons possessing an internal heat source could halve the time spent ironing and alleviate the discomfort of ironing next to a hot range or fire. Nonetheless, ironing continued to be a major, time consuming task.

Bathing

The labour involved in preparing a bath was sufficiently arduous in many working class households to discourage frequent bathing, no matter how desirable. Referring to survey findings P.E.P. noted:

> "It is the difficulty of heating water rather than cost, which deters people from taking baths more frequently; 68 per cent of families in the income group below £300 per annum said that they would take more baths if it were easier to heat the water. Only 5 per cent of those questioned were mainly influenced by expense in limiting the number of baths." (P.E.P. 1945 p.38).

In addition there was the problem of the location of the bath and the absence of specialised wash basins. In 1919 only about 10 per cent of all households had a plumbed-in bath, an unknown number used tin baths. In her study of Lambeth mothers (1913), Mrs Pember Reeves found that children were bathed once a week in the wash-tub in front of the kitchen fire; the mother bathed herself once a fortnight, and the father spent tuppence (2d) at the public baths when he had the money and the time. The work involved in bathing without piped water and a plumbed in bath was excessive.

Where a bath was installed it was generally located in the scullery close to the water supply. Very few families had a separate upstairs bathroom, those that did usually had to heat the water in a copper downstairs and pump the water up (Mass Observation 1943). After the Housing Act of 1924, all new council houses had to have a separate bathroom (Forty 1975), but as we have seen, this only benefited a very small minority of working class families in the inter-war period. Having the bath in the scullery meant that bathing and cooking could not reasonably take place at the same time. Many of the baths had a hinged lid which was used as a kitchen work surface, this had to be cleaned and cleared each time the bath was used.

Daily washing of the face and neck, as well as shaving, had to be performed at the scullery sink, and by the Second World War there was a general demand for separate wash basins in separate bathrooms. The 1951

Census showed that 37 per cent of all houses had no bath at all, not even a shared one, and many families were also obliged to use external and shared toilets (Forty 1975).

Cleaning

As long as coal remained the main fuel for space heating, cooking, and water heating, household cleaning was an endless struggle against ashes, soot, grime and dust generated internally by fires and generalised by atmospheric pollution. Despite hours of scrubbing, scouring and sweeping, it was quite impossible to maintain high standards of cleanliness in the damp vermin-ridden houses inhabited by thousands of families. Poorly constructed houses with draughty gaps in walls and floors defied traditional cleaning methods. The materials of which both buildings and furniture were made were difficult to clean; the more wood and stone was scrubbed the more porous and dirt absorbant it became.

Cleaning, polishing and tidying were major and time-consuming tasks, obviously made much more problematic and arduous if hot and cold water was not available on tap. These tasks were hampered by the rudimentary character of cleaning agents compared to those of today, and by a lack of mechanical appliances as aids in various cleaning tasks. Buckets, mops, brooms, brushes, dustpans and dusters remained the major cleaning instruments throughout the inter-war years. However, two mechanical appliances - one powered manually and one electrically - the carpet sweeper and the vacuum cleaner, did begin to

make a significant impact on home cleaning. The P.E.P. study noted:

> "...of the mechanical appliances available for cleaning, the cheapest, namely carpet sweepers, are most commonly used, followed by vacuum cleaners..." (P.E.P. 1945 p.31).

In the 1930s electric vacuum cleaners were sold at a rate second only to electric irons (Forty 1975), but this was still a largely middle class market.

> "The number of vacuum cleaners in use prior to the war is estimated at 2.3 million, and represents an ownership level of about 300 per 1,000 wired homes. This is somewhat under half the U.S. ownership level of 606 per 1,000 wired homes." (P.E.P. 1945 p.xxx).

The important thing about the vacuum cleaner was that it actually removed rather than redistributed dust and dirt, and with relatively little effort. Manually operated suction cleaners preceded the electric vacuum cleaner which did not become available in any quantity until the 1920s, and it was in the early 1930s that the cost of a vacuum cleaner fell markedly. An interesting point made by Forty is that it was the first appliance consciously redesigned to build in obsolescence so as to increase demand.

It was not just the expense of vacuum cleaners which prevented most working class families from obtaining one, but the fact that they had so few carpets and so little upholstered furniture to justify its use. Here we see how a rise in living standards becomes both a precondition and a spur for the performance of additional

domestic labour and the utilisation of more complex and expensive domestic means of production. After the Second World War the vacuum cleaner was to become one of the essential means of production utilised by the housewife to raise the standards of cleanliness and hygiene to a level previously unknown.

Food preparation

The diffusion of gas stoves brought about a transformation in working class cooking and dining arrangements in those households where conditions were 'good' or 'reasonable' (Rice 1939). In a house containing three downstairs rooms, one was generally referred to as the parlour or sitting room, another was the 'kitchen' or 'living room', the third being the 'scullery' or 'back kitchen'. The coal range was generally situated in the kitchen, while the water tap or taps, sink, draining board, copper, and sometimes the bath, would be located in the scullery. Before the installation of a gas cooker food would be prepared partly in the scullery and partly in the kitchen, and cooked on the coal range. Thus both cooking and eating took place in the kitchen. A gas cooker would, however, usually be installed in the scullery, thereby removing cooking from the 'kitchen' and transforming it into more of a 'living room', "The old tradition of eating and cooking in the same room began to fall into disuse." (Mass Observation 1943 p.101).

Good quality coal ranges continued to be used to heat the living room in winter and sometimes for cooking

and water heating as well. These combined functions made a coal range very economical during the winter months. However, many coal ranges, especially the smaller models found in working class homes, were badly designed, dirty and inefficient in all functions; it appears that where a choice could be exercised, gas cookers fairly quickly supplanted coal ranges. After about 1920, the coal range ceased to be a standard fitting in new homes. The Mass Observation Survey of 1943 noted that this change in cooking and dining arrangements led many local authorities to consider a second 'living room' an unjustifiable 'luxury' for working class families, and thousands of homes were subsequently built with only one living room plus a kitchenette.

Cooking on coal ranges entailed a considerable expenditure of labour. The range had to be prepared for lighting early in the morning; it created quantities of dirt and was very difficult to keep clean. The only treatment suitable for these cast iron monstrosities was blackleading and polishing. In addition, it was difficult to control and regulate the oven and hob temperatures. However, the pre-1920 gas cooker was also a cast iron monster with no reliable temperature control mechanism. Forty points out that one of the reasons for retarded design innovation was the practice of hiring cookers; outright purchase only began to predominate in the mid-1920s. As long as the customer hired the cooker the gas companies had an interest in prolonging the life of their appliances and hence discouraging design improvements. On

the other hand hiring apparently meant that housewives had little incentive to keep their cookers clean:

> "I am told by the gas company's official that very few people clean gas stoves. A woman who takes immense pride in a polished range lets her gas stove get into a disgusting state, in spite of the card of instructions issued by the gas company." (L. Eyles cited in Forty 1975 p.54).

During the 1920s, design improvements were made: lighter pressed steel panels and more easily cleaned enamels were used, and the introduction of the "Regulo" oven thermostat in 1922 represented a major technical innovation. The thermostat, "...enabled cooks, for the first time, to control oven temperatures numerically (e.g. 350 F) rather than in general terms (e.g. 'a slack oven') (Davidson 1982 p.67).

Despite the fairly rapid spread of gas cooking, about two million homes (17 per cent of the housing stock) still had a coal range as their sole cooking instrument in 1939, and a further unknown proportion of the urban and rural poor continued to do all their cooking on an open grate. In practice however:

> "The open fire often co-existed with a gas cooker in working class homes. For example, most cooking was conducted over an open fire in the Salford slums during the first quarter of this century, although single gas rings had already come into general use there. The same was true in London in the 1930s: most of the poorer households lacked any sort of range or cooked over an open fire or gas ring." (Davidson 1983 p.68).

The fact that the vast majority of working class families rented their accommodation from private landlords

had a considerable effect on the cooking and other appliances and utilities supplied for household use. The landlord's interests lay in installing only the minimum of fittings at the lowest cost. They usually provided cheap and inefficient coal ranges because it cost less than installing two pieces of equipment - a cooker and a boiler for heating water. On the other hand the tenants themselves had little interest in spending money (even if they had it) on home improvements, many of which would accrue only to the advantage of the landlord in the long run (Forty 1975). In this and many other respects landlordism formed a barrier to the working class raising it's standard of life. Essentially this was a barrier to the development of domestic productive forces in just the same way as landlordism has always been a barrier to the development of the productive forces where it is combined with small scale peasant agriculture.

The impact of temperature controlled gas cooking on the dietary habits of the working class family was far greater in its implications than in its actual effects during the inter-war years. The "Regulo" cook book introduced a greatly extended range of food items and dishes that could now be cooked with thermostatic control. But the range of food products bought by the average working class family was limited by inadequate income, the restricted number and variety of cooking utensils - pots, pans, bowls, and other tools - possessed, the amount of time available for food preparation and consumption, and the conservatism of family eating habits, traditions and

expectations. Forty argues on the other hand that the new cooking methods had important implications for the standard of cuisine expected of the housewife. She no longer had excuses, in the eyes of women's magazines, for singed roasts and burnt cakes; failure was a reflection of her own abilities, indeed:

> "Most other labour-saving equipment had the same effect, that while the equipment simplified work, it also made the housewife able to attain higher standards, and if she did not want to, or could not do so, the effect of the equipment was to make her feel at fault." (Forty 1975).

In general, the culinary practices of the working class family appear, nonetheless, to have changed little over the period. Rice remarked that the majority of housewives in her survey had:

> "...not got more than one or two saucepans and a frying pan, and even so, even if she is fortunate in having some proper sort of cooking stove, it is impossible to cook a dinner as it should be cooked, slowly and with the vegetables separate; hence the ubiquitous stew, with or without the remains of the Sunday roast according to the day of the week. She has nowhere to store food or if there is a cupboard in the room, it is invariably in the only living room and probably next to the fireplace. Conditions may be so bad in this respect that she must go out in the middle of her morning's work to buy the dinner." (Rice 1939 p.97).

The materials from which hollow-ware was manufactured did begin to change with the advent of the gas cooker. This required lighter, less substantial pans in place of the traditional cast-iron ware. Wrought iron products from Germany were followed by enamelled and then aluminium hollow-ware from the same country, the latter

were both more suitable and preferred in the new conditions (Fraser 1981). However, it is more than likely that most working class housewives continued to use those pots and pans already in their possession regardless of their suitability or desirability, until they were completely worn out; their replacements were judged more by their cost than their quality, ease of cleaning and so on.

All too few working class homes were built with adequate food storage facilities. Houses were constructed either without pantries or larders, or where these did exist they were badly positioned, frequently adjacent to the coal cellar, lacking ventilation, and subject to considerable temperature variation. Until a family could afford a refrigerator, food storage and the preservation of fresh foods remained a constant problem which dictated frequent, sometimes daily, visits to local shops for provisions.

To some extent shopping habits began to undergo change in the inter-war years as a result of the concentration and centralisation of retailing capital. This process had begun in the latter half of the 19th century and led to the growth in the size of shops and the disappearance of specialised shops which were replaced by multi-goods outlets and department stores. There was an increase in the number of multi-branch retailing firms:

> "The multiples were the shops of the mass market. They grew from the cheapening of a range of imported goods, and were geared to a limited range of items for mass sale. They were shops that set out to cater

> specifically for a better-off working class, offering first new staples of the working class diet, and then steadily broadening their range of goods as those new items which presented the least problems of storage and distribution became available in large enough quantities and cheaply enough." (Fraser 1981 p.115).

Despite earlier qualifications, there does seem to have been a shift from cold meals - bread and butter, pre-cooked meats, pies and so on - to hot meals cooked from scratch, among some sections of the working class. Thus, housewives utilised new household technology such as gas cookers to improve the quality of family food consumption through greater expenditure of labour in cooking. At the beginning of our period, for example, cooking was found to be "...very perfunctory and rudimentary" (Reeves 1913 p.111). The Sunday dinner was the main cooked meal of the week, commonly consisting of a joint, boiled rice or potatoes, greens, suet pudding and treacle. It was perhaps the one meal for which a penny would be put in the gas meter for the use of the stove or ring:

> "The rest of the week is managed on cold food, or the hard-worked sauce-pan and frying-pan are brought into play." (Reeves 1913 p.59).
>
> "Bread, however, is their chief food. It is cheap; they like it; it comes into the home ready cooked; it is always at hand, and needs no plate and spoon." (Reeves 1913 p.97).

By 1943 the Mass Observation survey refers to home-made cakes, pastry and soups as regularly cooked items. In the intervening years the midday meal appears to have become a relatively substantial cooked meal. In 1938 an enquiry

into the foods consumed in London and a number of provincial towns, The Peoples' Food by Sir William Crawford and H. Broadley, found that the mid-day meal was the main meal of the day in working class households, and that the majority of these were eaten at home. The P.E.P. report noted:

> "The Crawford enquiry showed that in urban families, between 50 and 60 per cent of husbands came home to the mid-day meal; on the other hand, between a quarter and a third used to take a packed lunch, an almost exclusively working class habit which has been partially changed by war conditions and improved canteen facilities. This trend will no doubt have a lasting effect, but only if the general level of purchasing power remains above the pre-war level. It was cheaper for the worker to take sandwiches, pasties and pies provided by the wife out of the housekeeping money, rather than to pay up to a shilling a day for a canteen meal. When several members of the family require a packed lunch, it required no little time and ingenuity on the part of the housewife to provide a filling and varied diet." (P.E.P. 1945 p.29).

Rice discovered that husbands, as well as children (whether of school age or at work but still living in the parental home), generally returned home during the middle of the day for dinner. However, they did not necessarily return at the same time, hence the housewife would spend a large proportion of her working day preparing dinners: cooking, serving, clearing and washing-up. Other meals were usually simpler, for example, breakfast generally consisted of bread, or toast, and butter or margarine with a cup of tea, possibly including porridge in some areas of the country. Electric appliances such as toasters, coffee percolators, juice extractors, etc. were possessed almost exclusively by the higher

income groups and utilised in the preparation of far more elaborate and expensive breakfasts (P.E.P. 1945). The Crawford enquiry found that tinned foods were generally beyond the means of the lowest paid workers' families and that consumption of tinned vegetables and fruits tended to increase in line with income (P.E.P. 1945).

These changes in the labour of food preparation demonstrate the way in which women utilised new technologies and raw materials to raise the standard of living of their families through the elaboration of certain aspects of the labour process. Thus while certain aspects of food preparation took less time, for example, the maintenance and cleaning of coal ranges, there was a clear tendency to reallocate labour-time to other aspects of the task which could be developed thereby improving the quantity and quality of the use-values produced.

The labour involved in washing- up obviously varied with the number of people fed, the quality and quantity of items of cutlery, crockery, pots and pans to be washed, and the number of courses: in short the quantity and variety of the food. Generally speaking, an improvement in the standard of life here signified an expansion of domestic labour-time. However, important as a countervailing force was the installation of a sink, hot and cold running water. Without some or all of these utilities, the fetching, carrying, heating and disposal of water added enormously to the labour of washing-up.

Space heating

I have already referred to space heating in it's connection with several household tasks. The introduction of gas cookers and integrated water heating systems made the open fire, or enclosed fire in a range, progressively redundant as a multi-functional means of production, but its function as space heater remained an indispensable one. In the inter-war years the vast majority could afford to heat only one room - the 'living room' - and many could not heat it sufficiently or for the length of time required and desired. In 95 per cent of the households surveyed in the Heating of Dwellings Inquiry (1943), solid fuel was used for space heating (Davidson 1982). Until coal and coke fires were supplanted by gas and electric heaters, and later by central heating systems, the provision of heat entailed the preparatory and cleaning tasks described earlier and remained a major component of total household labour. Of course, even today, thousands of households are still heated primarily by solid fuels and archaic technology.

Mending and sewing

This remained a vital component of domestic labour throughout the period although it was generally considered a leisure time pursuit. Rice reported that:

> "An overwhelming proportion [of women] say that they spend their 'leisure' in sewing and doing other household jobs, slightly different from the ordinary work of cooking and house-cleaning." (Rice 1939 p.103).

Although the ready-made clothing industry expanded output rapidly in the inter-war years, widespread poverty condemned many working class housewives to patching and altering clothing and household linen so as to prolong the useful life of each and every precious article. The degree to which women worked up clothes and other items from textile raw materials is unknown, but the ownership of sewing machines was found to be as high as 60 per cent of families in a 1937 survey (reported in P.E.P. 1945 p.20). If this percentage is an accurate reflection of general ownership patterns then it suggests that most better off working class families had this important hand or foot powered machine. It also suggests that domestic production in this area was particularly important to those better off families and that therefore a rise in income by no means signified a simple reduction of domestic labour. On the contrary it meant the ability to buy new means of production and an elaboration of dress-making tasks.

Childcare

Although the household tasks discussed in this section were performed for the reproduction of both adults and children, i.e. of the entire family, nonetheless there are specific childcare tasks which have not yet been touched upon. In fact, Feminist writers have paid much more attention to 'motherhood' in this period than to household labour per se, and an important body of literature now exists (see, for example, Anna Davin 1978, Dianna Gittins 1982, Carol Dyhouse 1978, Denise Riley

1981, Jane Lewis 1980, Elizabeth Roberts 1984). Given the comprehensiveness of the coverage I will only deal briefly with certain important points here.

Earlier I noted that the population growth rate in Britain fell markedly in the 1920s and 1930s. These years witnessed a demographic shift as working class family size began to decrease. Until 1900, the decline in family size took place mainly among the upper and middle classes (see Table 7). A fairly dramatic decline in the size of working class families became evident from 1900 to 1939, and particularly in the later inter-war years. This decline may initially have been related to later marriages, but after 1911 marriages took place at a younger age and marital fertility continued to decline (see Gittins (1982) for a discussion of some possible explanations).

Table 7

The Size of Family by Marriage Cohorts, 1861-9 to 1930-4, England and Wales

Marriages celebrated	Family size
1861- 9	6.16
1876	5.62
1886	4.81
1890- 9	4.13
1900- 9	3.30
1915-19	2.46
1925- 9	2.11
1930- 4	2.07

Source: Gittins 1982 p.210.

While the birth rate began falling from the 1860s, the infant mortality rate rose throughout the 1880s

and 1890s and into the 20th century (Davin 1978). These combined trends generated panic in certain quarters and fears that a declining middle class birth rate would result in the intellectual, moral and physical degeneration of the British 'race'. Anna Davin analyses the ensuing public debate, the rise of the Infant Welfare Movement, and the spread of eugenist ideology in the historical context of Britain's role as an imperialist power. From the imperialist point of view, Britain required a healthy and numerous population to fight in it's armed forces, to defend and expand it's territories, to settle in its colonies, and to meet the labour requirements of industry at home:

> "The old system of capitalist production (which itself had nourished imperial expansion), with its mobile workforce of people who were underpaid, underfed, untrained and infinitely replaceable, was passing. In its place, with the introduction of capital intensive methods, was needed a stable workforce of people trained to do particular jobs and reasonably likely to stay in them, neither moving on, nor losing too much time through ill-health." (Davin 1978 p.49).

Davin argues that in the 1900s motherhood was ideologically redefined as part of the response to these new social requirements:

> "The family remained the basic institution of society, and women's domestic role remained supreme, but gradually it was her function as mother that was being most stressed, rather than her function as wife." (Davin 1978 p.15).

Despite all the social and environmental factors now clearly understood to be directly linked to high

infant mortality - the poor health of the mother, poverty, bad housing, inadequate diet, lack of basic amenities like hot and cold running water - the public debate revolved around the failings of women as mothers:

> "...if the survival of infants and the health of children was in question, it must be the fault of the mothers, and if the nation needed healthy citizens (and soldiers and workers) then mothers must improve. This emphasis was reinforced by the influential ideas of the eugenists: good motherhood was an essential component in their ideology of racial health and purity. Thus the solution to a national problem of public health and of politics was looked for in terms of individuals, of a particular role - the mother, and a social institution - the family." (Davin 1978 p.12).

In the case of working class wives and mothers maternal ignorance and neglect were villified as the decisive causes of infant deaths and ill-health. This theme runs throughout the theory and practice informing welfare legislation, the work of voluntary societies for public health and domestic hygiene, and the pronouncements of individuals and organisations associated with the Infant Welfare Movement, of the pre-1914, First World War, and inter-war years. As Gittins points out: "... successful womanhood was becoming virtually synonomous with successful motherhood." (Gittins 1982 p.14).

What impact did this Infant Welfare Movement have on working class child-rearing practices? The ideology on which it was based almost completely ignored the real material difficulties faced by working class mothers, as well as their own frequent ill-health. Employed mothers had particular difficulties - children

had to be left at home or delivered into the care of relatives or child-minders during work hours. Much attention was paid to the question of infant feeding and working class mothers were frequently criticised for unsuitable feeding practices. Most women wanted to breast feed their babies, at least at first, but this was not always possible; inadequate nourishment of the mother often meant that she could not maintain a flow of milk. Bottle fed babies were certainly at risk; few families could afford fresh milk and many could buy only the cheapest condensed variety made from skimmed milk which was almost totally devoid of the necessary nutriments. There was certainly a lack of knowledge concering the sterilisation of bottles; bottles and teats were badly designed which, combined with a lack of facilities in the kitchen, added greatly to the danger of infection (Davin 1978).

Middle class notions about correct childrearing practices were often alien and completely impracticable in the working class domestic environment:

> "In the middle classes children were segregated and different, especially babies. They had special clothes, special food, special furniture, special rooms, sometimes special attendants... In the working class until very recently childhood had been much briefer, a less differentiated affair. Compulsory schooling over the previous two or three decades (since 1870) had extended children's period of dependence and reduced their economic role, but they were often still to middle class outsiders 'little adults' and 'old before their time'. Children - and babies - were much less excluded from adult life." (Davin 1978 p.36).

In the course of the inter-war years, a little more attention was paid to those social and environmental factors affecting both the health of the infant and the mother. The publication in 1915 of Maternity: Letters from Working Women, by the Women's Co-operative Guild under the secretaryship of Margaret Llewellyn Davies, had revealed the real difficulties and tragedies associated with working class motherhood: lack of adequate domestic and public resources, frequent pregnancies, miscarriages and still births, not to mention infant mortality.

Certainly, fewer children and improving material conditions in the better off working class household did begin to create the circumstances in which childcare tasks could be both elaborated and specialised, but this trend only became general among working class families after the Second World War. It was such changes in the material conditions of domestic life and labour, rather than the efforts of the Infant Welfare Movement or the state, which had the greatest impact on childcare in working class families. Davin makes this clear in relation to the inter-war years:

> "In the comparatively prosperous new estates of the midlands and the south motherhood was entering a new incarnation. It was increasingly unusual for married women to go out to work, but their children were fewer, their health was likely to be better, and their housing conditions were much improved. This made room for a more intense and home-based family life, with much closer involvement of mother and even father with their children and home centred activities like gardening, repairs and improvements. Ideologically it was expressed through an emphasis on the interest and value of careful home management, and the fulfilment to be found in efficient and loving care of husband, children and home." (Davin

1978 p.47).

Thus it was primarily the improvement in certain identifiable material conditions - income, housing, means of production for domestic labour - combined with the associated factors of improved maternal health and smaller families which enabled childcare to play an increasingly central role in household labour. Childcare was a developing and extending sphere of labour within the household - new tasks were arising, old ones were becoming more differentiated and specialised, and the overall time devoted to this combination showed a distinct tendency to increase. This chapter therefore demonstrates the correctness of the hypothesis concerning domestic labour-time discussed in previous chapters - that improved home and social conditions by no means signifies a necessary and ineitable decline in the expenditure of labour-time by the domestic labourer.

3. The Housewife

Having discussed the distinct labour tasks performed in working class households in the inter-war years, I now want to consider the position of the primary domestic labourer, the full-time working class housewife, whose labour unified these tasks in a single production process. Clearly this was a period in which the vast majority of ordinary families had yet to experience directly the full fruits of the 20th century revolution in the domestic means of production. As a result, household

labour had an inelastic character and remained an extremely physically exhausting type of work.

It was inelastic in the sense that very little could be done to reduce domestic labour-time. As we saw in the previous chapter, much modern household technology has a time-saving potential, even though its users may not exploit it. In the years before and after the First World War, the nature of the means of production available to the majority of households ensured that the option of reducing or varying domestic labour-time, and thus of combining housewifery with employment, by utilising means of production in a particular way was largely excluded.

There can be no doubt that household labour was also physically exhausting. The impact of modern household technology in relieving much of the physical burden associated with core household tasks was touched upon in the previous chapter. It is necessary to stress this aspect of the question here. While not seeking to deny that domestic labour is hard work today, it does not compare with the backbreaking, arduous, and frequently incapacitating toil endured by women several generations ago.

The Feminists and Labour women who addressed the question of women's work both inside and outside the home in the first four decades of this century, both exposed and condemned women's intolerable domestic burden. In her book, Working Class Wives, Rice vividly described the day to day drudgery of the inter-war period, for example:

> "...but the record given of hours spent at work, the size of the family, the inability to pay for any help outside, the inconvenience of the home, the lack of adequate utensils and of decent clothes - let alone any small household or personal luxury - yields a picture in which monotony, loneliness, discouragement and sordid hardwork are the main features - a picture of almost unredeemed drabness." (Rice 1939 p.94).

Washday was particularly gruelling:

> "At all times and in all circumstances it is arduous, but if she is living in conditions in which thousands of mothers live, having to fetch water from the bottom floor of a four-storied house or from 100-200 yards or even a quarter of a mile along the village street; if she has nowhere to dry the clothes (and these include such bedclothes as there may be) except in the kitchen in which she is cooking and the family is eating, the added tension together with the extra physical exertion, the discomfort of the home as well as the aching back, make it the really dark day of the week." (Rice 1939 p.160).

In a period when most household appliances considered essential today were promoted as new and exciting 'labour-saving' devices, a recurrent theme in the writings of several campaigners like Rice was precisely the technological backwardness and 'unscientific' character of household production and, in particular, the primitiveness of working class household labour(5):

> "It would be logical to suppose that the work of caring for the home and family, which is the most fundamental of all human activity, would be the first to profit by modern methods of socialisation and scientific management. But the rationalisation of labour has passed over the working mother, leaving her to carry on in more or less the same primitive way." (Spring Rice 1981 p.15).

In her 1915 study of married women's paid work (for the Women's Industrial Council) Clementina Black noted:

> "But the portion of their toil which is most onerous,

> least productive and least in line with modern development is not their industrial but their domestic work. In that direction, I believe, should lie the course of relief. For a variety of reasons the industry of housekeeping has not undergone the alteration of methods which has transformed other industries. It remains largely (and amongst the poor wholly) unspecialised; one person performs all the processes, using for their various purposes inadequate hand-driven tools." (Black 1915 p.8).

Thus the position of the working class housewife was a particularly unenviable one. Household labour was a full-time and primitive form of social production for which she had almost sole responsibility. Relatively advanced domestic means of production, although marketed, were very largely beyond reach. Although family size was in decline, most women suffered ill-health associated with frequent childbearing and unremitting household labour without recourse to basic health care services which were only later to be provided under the National Health Service.(6) And those women who were obliged to seek paid work to supplement or sustain the family income shouldered a quite intolerable double burden.

All of this illustrates in a concrete fashion the contradictions associated with the working class struggle for a domestic life discussed in Chapter Five. The fact that the working class could devote something like half its aggregate labour-power to the direct reproduction of itself was, for the reasons discussed in Chapter Five, an important gain of 19th century class struggle. On the other hand, the fact that this domestic labour-power was almost exclusively female (while wage-labour was predominantly male) and that household labour

in this period was so arduous, unpleasant, and time-consuming, meant that this class gain was simultaneously associated with the particularly acute oppression of women.

To the Feminists and social democratic reformers of the day, the problem was posed as follows: women's household responsibilities exclude employment during marriage - a woman cannot reasonably combine both; the solution lies either in making the role of the full-time housewife and mother more tolerable and rewarding with the social status it deserves - through a higher family wage paid to the spouse, better housing conditions with basic utilities and appliances, access to communal facilities, welfare services and so forth - or (and this was the minority perspective) in making it possible for women to seek employment in fulfilling jobs through some form of state sponsored domestic servant or worker scheme made available to all employed women (Black 1915, Burton 1944), or perhaps, by paying women higher, equal wages which would enable them to purchase services and appliances currently affordable only by the middle class. Either way, the housework would have to be done.

In the event, renewed capital accumulation in the post-war period laid the basis for a partial resolution of the problem in the form of a relatively manageable combination of unpaid and paid work (either full-time or part-time). Unprecedented economic growth sustained a general raising of working class domestic living conditions. The 'consumer boom' of the 1950s and

60s was largely a process of diffusion of modern domestic means of production to wider layers of the population. Household technology, while it did not directly cause a reduction in domestic labour-time so releasing women for employment, nevertheless lightened domestic toil and gave women the option of reducing domestic labour-time to a certain extent, and reorganising the household labour process to facilitate paid work under certain conditions. As we saw in the previous chapter, the revolution in the domestic means of production was not a causal factor in the post-war married women's employment trends. Rather, it was a facilitating factor which some women utilised for the purposes of combining paid and unpaid work, while others maximised household production, keeping up domestic labour-time. For working class wives in the inter-war years, however, the domestic work day was a long and weary one, and the labour process was dictated much more by external factors than by subjective design. Nevertheless, as in prior and subsequent periods, it appears that women used every opportunity to utilise old and new means of production at their disposal to improve the family's material conditions of life even in circumstances where they could have saved themselves time and effort. The utilisation of gas cookers to produce an increased quantity and quality of hot meals, with all the additional preparation and cleaning-up time involved, is one example noted earlier. This, I would argue, testifies once again to the fact that women's household labour is an important dynamic, contributory factor in the considerable raising

of 20th century living standards.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION: THEORY AND HISTORY IN HOUSEHOLD LABOUR STUDIES

Despite the rapid growth of a household labour studies tradition, a great deal of work remains to be done on household production in advanced capitalist societies. In particular, there is a need for integrated theoretical and empirical work. The four elements of the tradition identified in the Introduction suffer from theoretical or empirical exclusivity. The Domestic Labour Debate is a rather narrow theoretical discourse. The surveys of housewives, the time-use studies, and the histories of housework are generally lacking in theoretical analysis.

My analysis has been presented in two parts, Part One being largely theoretical, and Part Two, largely historical. This does not, however, reflect a separation between theory and history in the investigation of the subject or in the development of the analysis. I consciously set out to produce an analysis in which the theoretical positions had, on the one hand, been tested and reformulated in the light of secondary historical research, and on the other, were capable of making sense of patterns in real historical development.

Having outlined the results of this approach in the foregoing chapters, I want in this conclusion to briefly describe how the analysis changed and developed through the interaction of theoretical and historical

research. This illustrates how I arrived at some of the main conclusions expressed, but also serves as an example of the kind of approach that could be fruitfully employed in future research on household labour, so overcoming the theoretical-empirical divide.

It was the Debate which first drew me to the study of household labour, and it was not unnatural that I should begin by developing a critique of the Debate on the terrain of political economy without reference to the historical development of domestic labour. Through this critical assessment of existing theory certain important advances of a methodological and analytically substantive character were made. On method, I concluded, first, that the identification of the form of production represented by domestic labour necessitated the analytic abstraction from the sexual division of labour within the family. This laid the basis for a critique not only of the methodology employed in the Debate, but also of the methodology characteristic of the Materialist Feminist approach to household labour. Secondly, it became clear that many of the erroneous arguments in the Debate were the result not simply of a misunderstanding of certain key categories in Marxist political economy but, critically, the misunderstanding (or non-consideration) of Marx's method in Capital, and consequently of the assumptions upon which his schema of the reproduction of labour-power was based. Obviously, this question required serious consideration, not least, in relation to the method that should be employed in the development of a political economy of

domestic labour. The result, Chapter Two, is the systematic concretisation of Marx's schema.

In the first stages of the investigation, however, the substance of my political economy, though an advance on the Debate, was flawed in certain crucial respects. For example, I held that domestic labour was a form of value creating, commodity producing labour and not a form of use-value production. Thus I had fallen into the trap which had ensnared almost all contributors to the debate, that of assuming that domestic labour must be either commodity (value) production or use-value production for subsistence. The break with this either-or conceptualisation was possible through the study of the historical origin and development of capitalist household labour. So, an early turn towards historical research was of crucial importance.

I examined the transformation in economic relations in the period of transition from feudalism to capitalism, and the development of production relations in subsequent stages of pre-industrial and industrial capitalism. In relation to the period of transition, Marx's account of the process of primitive accumulation proved to be of particular importance. By focusing on the evidence from Marx and others concerning the reproduction of labour-power in the household, and looking at how labour in and around the home was transformed by the separation of the producers from their means of production, it was possible to come to two new conclusions: i) proletarian household labour represented a

fundamentally transformed, and thus new, form of direct subsistence production, ii) the transformation of labour-power into a commodity meant that this new form of subsistence production was simultaneously a form of simple commodity production; thus, capitalist household labour uniquely combined these two, historically antithetical, forms of production. It was now possible to transcend my own political economy by rejecting the position that domestic labour was not a form of use-value production but simply a specific form of simple commodity production. These conclusions led to another break with the Debate - its functionalism. Prior to any historical research, I found myself worrying that my analysis did not demonstrate how capital benefitted from domestic production. Unlike many analyses in the Debate, mine did not point to the conclusion that capital appropriated greater quantities of surplus-value than would otherwise be the case if domestic labour was completely socialised. What was the economic rationale for capital's sponsorship (or toleration) of a domestic sphere of production? Historical research prompted a reconsideration and rejection of this idealist way of posing the question. A rereading of the historical materialist premises, and a rereading of the Debate's critics on the question of functionalism, enabled me to develop the analysis in Chapter Three in which it is argued that domestic labour is as much the product of the process of separation of producers and means or production as is capitalist production itself. Domestic labour owes its existence not to the 'interests' of capital but, like

any other form of production endemic to a whole epoch in the history of human modes of production, to objective laws remoulding the economic base of society at a particular stage in the development of natural and social productive forces. This, in turn, informed the further development of the critique of Materialist Feminism. It was now clear that Materialist Feminists shared the functionalist approach to the existence of forms of production, but substituted the interests of men for those of capital. Secondly, having established that household production under capitalism is a historically distinct form of production, the view that women's domestic labour is a historically ubiquitous form of production underpinning patriarchy through the ages, could now be questioned.

In the end, I was able to develop a political economy of domestic labour in Part One which, I would argue, is both new and far more thoroughgoing in it's treatment of method and it's application of Marxist economic categories than any analysis produced in the Debate. This political economy was built upon a rejection of functionalist assumptions about the existence of forms of production and the idealist rationalisation of their economic content. In addition, the historical roots of working class household labour were located, alongside those of capitalist production itself, in the separation of direct producers from their means of production - the essence of the process of primitive accumulation. It is perhaps surprising that nowhere in the household labour

literature has the question of the origin of capitalist household labour been answered in this way, in fact, the question itself is rarely posed.

I shall now move on to look at how my research into the historical development of working class household labour was given coherence by the theoretical analysis. I had determined to study the development of household labour in 19th and 20th century Britain, and embarked upon secondary historical research with certain preconceptions which proved to be unfounded. These, not uncommon, preconceptions were assembled from a number of sources - conventional economics, some Feminist writings, women's studies courses - and can be summarised as follows: with the rise of industrial capitalism home and work were separated; production moved into the factories and women were left in the home to perform housework - a shadow of their former productive activities in the home; as industry developed, household production continued to be undermined as domestic tasks were systematically transferred to the industrial and service sectors; by the mid-20th century, household labour no longer kept married women at home and they entered the labour force en masse.

Contrary to expectations, the evidence pointed to the fact that domestic labour was an expanding and developing sphere of production in the second half of the 19th century which, by the turn of the century, occupied in full-time activity the majority of working class wives, and, judging by the time-use data, continued in this century to consume considerable quantities of society's

labour-power. This evidence provided the framework for Chapters Five, Six and Seven, but the question remained, how could this pattern of development be explained? What was the motive force? A materialist explanation was possible once the idealist view that the answer lay in the ability of capital, or men (or both), to purposively construct a domestic sphere for women was rejected. The starting point was my analysis of domestic labour as a combined form of commodity and subsistence production.

Household production emerged alongside capitalist production as part of a total system of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of the productive forces. Historically, domestic labour confronted the developing class of wage-labourers as an objectively necessary labour activity. This was labour necessary for the reproduction of their commodity labour-power, a commodity inseparable from their physical being. Thus it was labour for the reproduction of life itself. The working class had to engage in two types of labour to reproduce themselves and their commodity: wage labour and domestic labour. Against the encroachments of capital upon necessary labour-time in both spheres, the working class had to resist. From this, I came to the view that, in a crucial respect, the real pattern of development of domestic labour was decided in the class struggle. In the context of the severe curtailment of necessary domestic labour in the first phase of industrialisation, 19th century working class struggle can be seen, in part, as the struggle for the right, the time, the physical energy,

the means of production, and the material conditions generally, with which to engage in necessary labour for itself outside the workplace. Thus, the conflict over necessary and surplus labour-time should not be reduced to the struggle over the division of the working day in the workplace; the division of society's total social labour-time between the workplace and the home is a crucial dimension.

On the basis of this historical research it was also possible to contextualise the value thesis. First, it became clear that domestic labour not only transfers value and creates new value, but is an important precondition for the realisation of the value of the commodity labour-power. In the final section of Chapter Five I discussed how, in the context of the 19th century, one essential prerequisite for the sale of labour-power at it's value was that the owners of this commodity, the working class, had the opportunity and the material means to renew it's useful properties, to reproduce it on a daily basis. This required the productive consumption of part of working class labour-power and domestic means of production, in household production. Secondly, the pattern of development of household labour was clearly associated with definite stages, or periods, of capital accumulation. Working class domestic labour expanded in precisely the period in which relative rather than absolute surplus-value became the stable basis of capital accumulation. The tendency for the value of labour-power to rise as a result of new value created by domestic labour intensified at the same time as

did the tendency for the value of labour-power to fall as a result of the systematic cheapening of wage-goods (most of these serving as domestic means of production); the latter tendency could contain the former such that increasing domestic labour-time posed no threat to accumulation.

In Part Two I argued that the working class struggle for a domestic life against the usurpation of this time by capital was a progressive one. However, as was discussed in Chapter Five, the way in which the problem of domestic labour was resolved in practice, through the consolidation of the sexual division of labour within and outside the family, greatly strengthened sexual inequality. While the struggle for domestic labour expressed the objective class interests of both men and women, it was practically expressed through struggles around the length of the working day, wages, conditions, and so on, in a language which reflected the pre-existing subordination of women and served to reinforce it. Thus the historical development of household labour is riven with a contradiction for working class women. As a reproductive unit, the working class family acts both as a unit of defence against capital and as a unit in which the sexual oppression of women is articulated.(1)

One conclusion, following from the above, is that the role of the working class family should not be either wholly negatively or positively asserted, as it is in so much of the literature. Rather, it expresses real contradictions. Further, it would be wrong to view women

as passive victims who simply shoulder the burden of housework and childcare thrust upon them. My research into household labour in the inter-war and post-war years of this century reveals that women have used their domestic means of production to continually raise the standard of living for themselves and their families. The twentieth century domestic technological revolution has not led to any dramatic decline in the time spent in household labour, despite its time-saving potential, within certain limits. Why? To an important extent, the answer lies in the creative use to which women have put this technology, resulting in qualitative advances in the material conditions of life. It would be too simplistic to portray women as dupes of capitalist advertisers or as victims of husbands who force them to elaborate domestic labour, although these pressures are undoubtedly present and play a role in moulding women's household labour. Given the emphasis in much Feminist literature on women as acted upon rather than as actors, I have stressed that women's labour in the home is a dynamic and determining factor in working class material conditions of life. This point must also be made against the wider view that living standards are equated with (male) wage levels.

Thus the interaction between theoretical analysis and historical research can throw up new ideas and perspectives. In reviews, it is often stated that the Domestic Labour Debate led the theoretical analysis of domestic labour into a blind alley. The strength of my approach is not that all the questions have been answered,

but precisely that the analysis poses new questions and opens the way for further research. In every Chapter the analysis is relatively underdeveloped and can be taken in directions which I hope are fairly self-evident. In particular there is a need for more work on the changing nature of 'household production' in the transition between feudalism and capitalism. Another way of approaching the issues raised by proletarianisation and the development of a specifically capitalist form of household production would be the study of contemporary societies, or peoples, in the transition from peasant based subsistence production to complete dependence on wage-labour. The capitalist manufacture of domestic means of production is another important subject for investigation. In my treatment of the domestic labour process I have discussed the technical aspects of various domestic means of production, but have largely ignored the history of their invention and production within capitalist industry. In Marx's schemas of reproduction, Department II comprises the 'means of consumption' of the capitalist and working classes (Capital Volume Two 1978). If it is recognised that, in the main, these means of consumption serve as means of production in the household labour process, what role has the expansion and development of domestic production played in the expansion and development of particular branches of capitalist industry, and hence of capitalist production generally?

Finally, to return to the question of the relationship between the study of domestic labour and the

study of the sexual division of labour. My analysis has not explained why the primary domestic labourers in our society are women. Feminists have argued that if a theoretical analysis of domestic labour does not explain, or attempt to explain, this sexual division of labour, then it is of little or no value. My argument is that the analysis of the existence and economic character of domestic labour cannot provide the explanation for the material basis, or for the form taken by, the sexual divison of labour, and vice versa. The two issues are analytically separate and require independent theoretical and empirical research. I discussed in Chapter One how the analytical conflation of these two separate questions has led to functionalist and idealist analyses. Nevertheless, this thesis is a contribution towards the development of a materialist theory of women's oppression. An analysis of women's oppression within capitalism requires an understanding of the economic structures upon and around which the sexual division of labour is articulated. Domestic production is a fundamental element in the economic structures of the capitalist epoch. A theoretical understanding of the nature of this production, combined with a materialist analysis of the sexual division of labour, can lay the basis for a Marxist theory of women's oppression.

Notes - Introduction

1) I am referring here to the social scientific study of household labour and not to the study of 'household management' or 'home economics' associated with Domestic Science, a separate discipline.

2) For other examples of 'housewife' studies see Helena Z. Lopata's Occupation Housewife (1971) and Lee Comer's Wedlocked Women (1974). In addition, there are a number of studies focusing upon women who combine paid and unpaid work, for example, Viola Klein's classic Britain's Married Women Workers (1965).

3) For many years the 'sociology of the family' was the prerogative of functionalist theorists, particularly Talcott Parsons. Their approach has been severely criticised by Feminist and Marxist theorists in recent years. For a useful account of current sociological debates on the family see Paul Close's Family Form and Economic Production (1985).

4) Most of this literature takes the form of articles. One of the first, rarely referred to by others in this field, appeared in the journal Technology and Culture in 1965 by Alison Ravetz. She raised many of the issues which were taken up in the 1970s and 1980s.

5) Many of these studies are catalogued in an International Labour Office publication, Unpaid Work in the Household (1982) by Luisella Goldschmidt-Clermont.

6) See, for example, Humphries (1977(a), 1977(b)), Molyneux (1979), Kaluzynska (1980), Barrett (1980), Curtis (1980), Oakley (1980).

7) Several collections have been published, for example, Mallos (1980), Fox (1980), Berk (1980), Close and Collins (1985). In addition there are a number of unpublished theses referred to in the literature, most of them American, which I have not been able to obtain.

8) Several of these are referred to in Part Two.

9) In general, the terms 'domestic labour' and 'household labour' are used interchangeably throughout this thesis. However the latter term has a wider applicability. In non-capitalist societies there are forms of production within the home which could be loosely described as types of household labour. It follows from the analysis in Chapter Two, however, that household labour under capitalism is a distinct and thus historically specific form of production. Throughout, the term 'domestic labour' is used only in relation to this distinct form of capitalist household labour. Further, the term domestic labour refers to working-class household labour, not to unpaid household labour within the homes of the bourgeoise. This, again,

follows from the analysis in Chapter Two (see note (12) to Chapter Two).

10) Household labour is not confined to those tasks traditionally undertaken by the housewife. Men, children and women other than the resident housewife can, and do, perform unpaid household work. Certain household tasks are traditionally male (for example, car maintenance, 'do-it-yourself' home repairs). As we shall see in Chapter One, any attempt to posit an absolute identity of domestic labour with women's household labour has important theoretical consequences.

11) It is only in recent decades that most contemporary Marxists have broken with the traditional economists' view that:

> "The home has ceased to be the glowing centre of production from which radiate all desirable goods, and has become but a pool towards which products made in other places flow - a place of <u>consumption</u> - not <u>production</u>." (Richards (1915) quoted in Reid 1943 p.3).

Hazel Kyrk (1929), Margaret Reid (1934) and Mary Inman (1942) were early challengers of this view within neo-classical (Kyrk, Reid) and Marxist (Inman) economics. Writing in the 1930s, Reid argued that household labour involved the creation of finished material 'goods' and the

performance of services. She proposed the following criteria for separating productive from non-productive activities:

> "If an activity is of such a character that it might be delegated to a paid worker, then that activity shall be deemed productive." (Reid 1934 p.11).

From a Marxist standpoint there should be no difficulty in distinguishing production from consumption. However, there is confusion in the Debate about Marx's usage of the term 'individual consumption' (see Chapter Four). The breakdown of 'consumption in general' into 'productive consumption' and 'individual consumption' is discussed in Chapter Two; these categories play a crucial role in my own analysis. At the general level, production can be defined as the process of creation, through labour, of material and immaterial use-values which satisfy human needs in one way or another. In consumption, the product, "becomes a direct object and servant of individual need and satisfies it in being consumed" (Marx 1973 p.89). Consumption involves the "destruction of the prior product" (Marx 1973 p.91), its decomposition (at once, or over time), and is thus the antithesis of production. From these criteria one should be able to separate household production from acts of consumption within the home.

An interesting critique of the traditional neo-classical view of household labour from a non-Marxist perspective

can be found in Economics and the Public Purpose (1973) by John Kenneth Galbraith. In his opinion, women have been converted into a 'crypto-servant class' whose economic function is to to "administer and otherwise manage consumption" (Galbraith 1973 p.31). Mary Inman's work is briefly discussed in Chapter Four.

Notes - Chapter One

(1) Materialist Feminism is a term which identifies the work of a number of Feminist theorists who give male domination primacy in their analyses of women's oppression, but attempt to root this domination in 'material' factors. Shulamith Firestone (1979), for example, sees biological factors as the material substratum of women's oppression. Others focus upon economic relations outside and inside the home. My critique is of those theorists who root patriarchy in domestic production relations, particularly Christine Delphy (1980(a)) and Heidi Hartmann (1976, 1979, 1981), (but see also Walby (1983), Bradby (1982)). There has been some debate about the merits of Materialist Feminism in general, see Delphy's A Materialist Feminism is possible (1980(b)).

(2) For Delphy this conceptual fusion is based upon an identity of domestic labour and women's household labour in reality:

> "...domestic labour and childrearing are 1) exclusively the responsibility of women and 2) unpaid" (Delphy 1980(a) p.3).

(3) This is not the place to give a detailed exposition and critique of the content of Delphy's analysis. To a large extent this has already been done elsewhere: see for example Barrett and McIntosh (1979), Middleton (1983), Molyneux (1979).

(4) Unlike Delphy, Hartmann also views capital, as well as the male sex, as an organiser of women's paid and unpaid labour:

> "Who benefits from women's labour? Surely capitalists, but also surely men, who as husbands and fathers receive personalised services in the home." (Hartmann 1979 p.6).

(5) I am concerned here only with the theoretical methodology characteristic of this Debate; its substance is discussed in Chapter Four.

(6) Despite Molyneux's correct identification of functionalism as one of the problems with the Debate, it appears from other passages in her article that she objects not so much to functionalism as such, as to the assertions that it is capital's rather than men's

interests which are of crucial significance:

> "...with the notable exception of Delphy, many contributors to this debate avoid discussing the relations between the sexes altogether; these are rarely seen as in any way antagonistic because the aim is to show that it is primarily capital, rather than, for instance men, which benefits from women's subordination." (Molyneux 1979 p.22).

(7) For one such dismissal of the Debate, see Kaluzynska (1980).

(8) This ordering reflects the fact that I arrived early on at some important methodological principles, first, that the search for the historical origins of household production can only be successfully conducted after the completion of the analysis of the type of production domestic labour is, and secondly, that this primary analysis requires that one study domestic labour in its most developed form, that is, under conditions of developed industrial capitalism. In other words it is necessary to begin with household labour under developed capitalism in order to establish what is specific to it in terms of its production relations, its 'concrete useful' forms, and its relationship to capitalist commodity production. Once this has been achieved it is possible to identify its real historical precedents and its manner of historical development. If this order of investigation is

not followed it is easy to fall into the trap of conflating household labour under capitalism with other quite distinct forms of production. This last point is of considerable importance for any analysis of household labour and is discussed on a number of occasions in the following chapters.

Notes - Chapter Two

(1) The reproduction of labour-power involves both the daily maintenance of existing members of the working class, as well as the replacement of one generation of workers with another. The single term 'reproduction' is used throughout to cover both dimensions of the production of the commodity labour-power. It is also useful to quote here Marx's definition of labour-power from Capital Volume One:

> "We mean by labour-power, or labour-capacity, the aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing in the physical form, the living personality, of a human being, capabilities which he sets in motion whenever he produces a use-value of any kind." (Marx 1976 p.270).

(2) Throughout this chapter I refer at different times to the reproduction of labour-power on an aggregate (the working class), family (composition unspecified), and

individual level. This does not, of course, exhaust the diversity of structures within which labour-power is reproduced; the categories are merely conveniences for analytic purposes. The fact that domestic labour is performed by working class individuals living alone, by couples, in single parent households and those comprised of unrelated groups of people, does not alter the substance of the analysis concerning the nature of this production.

(3) There are many references in Capital Volume One to the analytical abstract method, the pure form theoretical conception, the necessity of abstracting from disturbing influences and so forth; for example:

"In its pure form, the circulation process necessitates the exchange of equivalents, but in reality processes do not take place in their pure form." (Marx 1976 p.262).

"If prices actually differ from values, we must first reduce the former to the latter i.e. disregard this situation as an accidental one in order to observe the phenomenon of the formation of capital on the basis of the exchange of commodities in its purity, and to prevent our observations from being interfered with by disturbing incidental circumstances which are irrelevant to the actual course of the process." (Marx 1976 p.269 - footnote).

"The division of labour converts the product of labour into a commodity, and thereby makes necessary its conversion into money. At the same time, it makes it a matter of chance whether this transubstantiation succeeds or not. Here, however, we have to look at the phenomenon in its pure shape, and must therefore assume it has proceeded normally." (Marx 1976 p.203).

(4) Thus Marx states:

"In order to examine the object of our investigation in its integrity, free from all disturbing subsidiary circumstances, we must treat the whole world of trade as one nation, and assume that capitalist production is established everywhere and has taken possession of every branch of industry." (Marx 1976 p.727).

Another important passage outlining the assumptions upon which Capital is based is found in Theories of Surplus Value Part One:

"In considering the essential relations of capitalist production it can therefore be assumed that the entire world of commodities, all spheres of material production - the production of material wealth - are (formally or really) subordinated to the capitalist mode of production... for this is what is happening more and more completely; [since it] is the principle

goal, and only if it is realised will the productive powers of labour be developed to their highest point... On this premise - which expresses the limit [of the process] and which is therefore constantly coming closer to an exact presentation of reality - all labourers engaged in the production of commodities are wage-labourers, and the means of production in all these spheres confront them as capital." (Marx 1975 pp.409-410).

(5) Thus Marx states:

"What I have to examine in this work is the capitalist mode of production, and the relations of production and forms of intercourse that correspond to it. Until now, their locus classicus has been England. This is the reason why England is used as the main illustration of the theoretical developments I make." (Marx 1976 p.90).

(6) Of course, Marx actually begins with simple commodity production in Capital Volume One - and then proceeds to the capitalist form of commodity production. See section seven of this chapter, and the discussion on this point in Chapter Four.

(7) I dwell upon these concepts firstly because they play an essential role in my theoretical analysis, but also because the misunderstanding of Marx's category

'individual consumption' has led to important errors in the Domestic Labour Debate. For more on this see Chapter Four.

(8) I have examined here the main ways in which domestic labour utilises and/or transforms products of labour bought with the wage into means of subsistence. Throughout, references to 'the production of means of subsistence in the domestic labour process' should be understood to cover all the ways in which subsistence goods and services are produced by domestic labour.

(9) This raises an interesting problem in relation to Marx's division of social production under capitalism into Departments I and II. Department II comprises "...commodities that possess a form in which they enter the individual consumption of the capitalist and working classes" (Marx 1978 p.471). However, we have seen that most commodities bought with wages serve as <u>means of production</u> in the domestic labour process. As soon as one relaxes the assumption that all material production is capitalist commodity production, the division of social production into basic categories becomes more complicated. Should Department II be subdivided into two, such that subdivision (a) comprises commodities that possess a form in which they enter, <u>directly</u>, the individual consumption of the capitalist and working classes, while, (b) comprises commodities which serve as means of production in all coexisting <u>non-capitalist</u> spheres of production -

domestic labour, other forms of simple commodity production, peasant subsistence production and so on? Or perhaps subdivision (b) should stand as a separate department - Department III? Such ideas, in relation to peasant production for example, are not new. However one resolves this, one thing remains clear: even after concretisation, the two departments as defined by Marx retain validity from the point of view of the capitalist production process; all that is required is a basic distinction between products which stay within the sphere of capitalist production as means of production, and those which leave it, whatever their destiny.

(10) I shall refer to labour expended within capitalist relations of production as 'capitalist labour' for convenience. This includes labour objectified in material means of subsistence and labour expended in 'services' resulting in no tangible article.

(11) It is important to remember that this is only an analytical distinction. In practice, a peasant, for example, may produce a particular kind of agricultural produce, part of which is sold and part of which is consumed by the family.

(12) This poses a question about the unpaid household labour i) in the homes of the bourgeoisie, and ii) in industrial societies which have a working class but which are not capitalist, i.e. the Soviet Union and other

'socialist' societies. In both cases labour-power is reproduced by household labour of a similar concrete, useful character as in the homes of the Western proletariat, but in neither case does labour-power take the form of a commodity. Clearly unpaid household labour in such circumstances does not represent a unity of direct subsistence production and commodity production; only one side of this duality is present - direct subsistence production (something of a misnomer in the case of the bourgeoisie). Hence such household production is not domestic labour if the latter term, as I would insist, applies strictly to household labour which is a combined form of production for direct use and for exchange. This may seem pedantic, but in fact such careful distinctions are crucial. We must be able to differentiate clearly between different forms of labour 'in the home' no matter how similar they may appear either on the surface of things, or in terms of the gender of the person who performs the labour. If we don't, it is all too easy to collapse into one category, 'household labour', forms of production as diverse as 'domestic production' in the homes of all classes under the primitive communist, slave, feudal, independent peasant and artisan, capitalist, and post-capitalist modes of production. Such a universal category is of very little value either in the study of economic relations, or in the formulation of political perspectives.

Thus I would characterise unpaid household labour performed by the bourgeoisie for their own

reproduction as a form of direct subsistence production. The household labour of the Soviet working class similarly appears on superficial examination to be a form of direct subsistence production. However, such a position requires the confirmation of further research.

There is no contradiction in characterising the labour of the working class as domestic labour, and that of the bourgeoisie as household labour for direct subsistence. At this stage in the analysis, one is concerned neither with the actual labour tasks performed nor the actual products produced, but with the social relations of production involved - the form of social production. The two classes have a different relationship to societies' means of production in both the capitalist and domestic spheres of production. In their household production, the working class are engaged in reproducing one of capital's essential means of production - the commodity labour-power. The capitalist class are reproducing the people who buy that commodity and utilise its value creating property for the purpose of accumulation. Thus the household labour of the two classes is qualitatively different from the point of view of social production in general. This is not to say however, that bourgeois and working class housewives have no common experiences (of oppression), but it is the sexual division of labour rather than the economic <u>identity</u> of their production which is the <u>source</u> of this shared experience.

(13) For a discussion about this important point, see

Chapter Four.

(14) In the rest of this chapter, I shall use the term 'average social labour' in preference to Marx's other expressions such as 'human labour in the abstract', 'homogenous human labour' etc., in order to keep in mind the truly social character of the substance of value.

(15) This is not the place to discuss the issues surrounding the 'family wage' (Land 1980). In this theoretical presentation I will maintain Marx's assumption that a family wage is that paid to the adult male worker which is truely equivalent to the value necessary to reproduce the entire family.

(16) There are other factors of significance in the determination of the value of the commodity labour-power (geographical location, levels of skill and so on), but these are of no direct relevance here.

(17) At the stage in the analysis in Capital Volume One where Marx analyses the transfer of value of the means of production, he has already moved from simple commodity production to capitalist production; however the principles involved apply to commodity production in general - in both its simple and capitalist forms. See Chapter Five of Capital Volume One: Constant Capital and Variable Capital.

(18) In capitalist production, these properties of labour become the property of capital:

> "But as something which creates value, as something involved in the process of objectifying labour, the worker's labour becomes one of the modes of existence of capital, it is incorporated into capital as soon as it enters the production process. This power which maintains old values and creates new ones is therefore the power of capital, and that process is accordingly the process of self-valorizaton." (Marx 1976 p.988).

(19) The amount of time spent in household labour has been the subject of a number of time-allocation studies. See Chapter Six.

(20) Thus we are dealing with the arithmetic mean of the arithmetic mean. Marx made this clear in relation to the average composition of capital:

> "The many individual capitals invested in a particular branch of production have compositions which differ from each other to a greater or lesser extent. The average of their individual compositions gives us the composition of the total capital in the branch of production under consideration. Finally, the average of all the average compositions in all branches of production gives us the composition of

the total social capital of a country, and it is with this alone that we are concerned here in the final analysis." (Marx 1976 pp.762-763).

(21) In the Appendix to the Penguin edition of Capital Volume One Marx provides us with a clear illustration of this in relation to the intensity of labour:

"But if the spinning is carried out with a degree of intensity normal in its particular sphere e.g. if the labour expended on producing a certain amount of yarn in an hour = the normal quantity of yarn that an hour's spinning will produce on average in the given social conditions, then the labour objectified in the yarn is socially necessary labour. As such it has a quantitatively determined relation to the social average in general which acts as the standard, so that we can speak of the same amount or a greater or smaller one. It therefore expresses a definite quantum of average social labour." (Marx 1976 p.1019).

(22) The use of the term 'productive' here has nothing to do with the categories productive and unproductive labour. For a discussion about the misuse of these categories in the Domestic Labour Debate, see Chapter Four.

(23) The productivity of average social labour will of course be determined by society's entire commodity

producing labour, including domestic labour. However, it will be overwhelmingly determined by the productivity of capitalist commodity producing labour, because it is within capitalist production relations that the great mass of society's productive capacity is harnessed. The productivity of simple commodity producing labour, including domestic labour, will have a relatively minor effect on the divergence of the overall productivity of average social labour from the average productivity of labour of specifically capitalist labour.

(24) This is probably an underestimation of the true divergence between the average intensities of domestic labour and average social labour.

(25) I shall assume in this section for the purposes of illustration that each week the whole wage is spent on means of consumption which are consumed in their entirety during that period. Of course in reality, the value of many wage goods is transferred piecemeal to the commodity labour-power, over an extended period of time.

(26) The actual figure is 49.9 pence, rounded up to 50 pence.

(27) This is an assumption Marx often made:

> "The labour-power is sold, although it is paid for only at a later period. It will therefore be useful,

if we want to conceive the relation in its pure form, to presuppose for the moment that the possessor of labour-power, on the occasion of each sale, immediately receives the price stipulated in the contract." (Marx 1976 p.279).

(28) I follow Marx in making this assumption the basis of the theoretical analysis; thus Marx says of capital's practice of paying the working class wages below the value of labour-power:

"Despite the important part which this method plays in practice, we are excluded from considering it here by our assumption that all commodities, including labour-power are bought and sold at their full value." (Marx 1976 p.431).

(29) More specifically:

"In order to make the value of labour-power go down, the rise in the productivity of labour must seize upon those branches of industry whose products determine the value of labour-power, and consequently either belong to the category of normal means of subsistence, or are capable or replacing them. But the value of a commodity is determined not only by the quantity of labour which gives it its final form, but also by the quantity of labour contained in the instruments by which it has been produced... Hence a

fall in the value of labour-power is also brought about by an increase in the productivity of labour, and by a corresponding cheapening of commodities in those industries which supply the instruments of labour and the material for labour, i.e. the physical elements of constant capital which are required for producing the means of subsistence. But an increase in the productivity of labour in those branches of industry which supply neither the necessary means of subsistence nor the means by which they are produced leaves the value of labour-power undisturbed." (Marx 1976 p.432).

(30) This would be offset by a lengthening of average domestic labour-time, i.e. increases in the extensive magnitude of domestic labour.

Notes - Chapter Three

(1) In Capital, Marx assumes that all commodities are produced capitalistically, with the exception of the commodity labour-power:

"On the other hand, on the assumption that capital has conquered the whole of production - and that therefore a commodity (as distinct from a mere use-value) is no longer produced by any labourer who is himself the owner of the conditions of production for

producing this commodity - that therefore only the capitalist is the producer of commodities (the sole commodity excepted being labour-power)..." (Marx 1969 p.158: my emphasis in parenthesis).

(2) I am referring specifically to Marx's account of the separation of the producers from their unity with the means of production, found in Capital Volume One. Roberta Hamilton (1978) is one of the few to use this account as the basis of her analysis of the changing position of women, particularly in the 17th century. Hamilton is not, however, centrally concerned with household labour. In fact, domestic labour plays a very subordinate role in her study, and her analysis contains several important errors. One is to confuse the production relations specific to the period of transition between feudalism and capitalism, with feudal relations themselves; another is the identification of the independent peasant family's means of production with 'capital'. The following sentence illustrates both errors:

> "The economic basis of the feudal family - that its members jointly made a living from the land - had rested on the unity between capital and labour." (Hamilton 1978 p.24).

For Marx, the independent private property of the peasant producer was a property form which, classically, developed out of the destruction of feudal relations based upon the

extraction of surplus labour from the producers in the form of rent - either labour rent, rent in kind, or the money rent:

> "The private property of the worker in his means of production is the foundation of small-scale industry, and small-scale industry is a necessary condition for the development of social production and of the free individuality of the worker himself. Of course, this mode of production also exists under slavery, serfdom and other situations of dependence. But it flourishes, unleashes the whole of its energy, attains its adequate classical form, only where the worker is the free proprietor of the conditions of his labour, and sets them in motion himself: where the peasant owns the land he cultivates, or the artisan owns the tool with which he is an accomplished performer." (Marx 1976 p.927).

Neither should capital be identified simply with means of production. Capital, as Marx tirelessly repeated, is a social relation not a thing. In so far as it relates to the labour-process, the concept 'capital' expresses the form that the various ingredients of that process take under specifically capitalist production relations (means of production, labour-power, and so on).

(3) See, for example: MacIntosh (1979), Delphy (1980(a)), 1980(b)), Hartmann (1976, 1979, 1981), Walby (1983),

Murgatroyd (1983).

(4) Of the three, only Hartmann can be characterised as a Materialist Feminist. Seccombe's position is closer to Marxist Feminism than either Materialist Feminism or Marxism. Mary Inman, writing in the late 1930s and 1940s as a member of the Communist Party of the United States, advanced an analysis that could now be regarded as Marxist Feminist. Thus the 'dual modes of production and reproduction' model spans various theoretical perspectives within Feminism.

Notes - Chapter Four

(1) For an interesting discussion about the United States Communist Party's debates and activities on the 'woman question', see Robert Shaffer's article, Women and the Communist Party, USA, 1930-1940 (1979). The Domestic Labour Debate was revived in the 1970's in the pages of Political Affairs, the journal of the USCP: see Cowl (1972), Larguia and Dumoulin (1972), Ferneyhough (1974), Hyman (1974).

(2) See, for example, Nona Glazer-Malbin (1976), Ellen Malos (1980), Paul Smith (1978), Maxine Molyneux (1979).

(3) One exception is Joan Landes:

"The production of use-values in the family therefore resembles the organic, non-rationalised and qualitative dimensions of a unified work process characteristic of pre-capitalist societies. At the same time, the family is a solidly capitalist relation. As such, it embodies dialectic unity between production for use and production for exchange. Production within the family is oriented toward exchange-value obtained through the sale of labour-power even though this production is simultaneously the production of use-value for the entire family." (Landes 1980 p.264).

However, Joan Landes does not develop this insight to produce a detailed analysis of the political economy of domestic labour.

(4) A number of contributions were also directed against an earlier position advanced by Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James in The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community (originally published in 1971). They had argued that by reproducing male labour-power in the home, women were also producing surplus-value for the capitalist:

"What we mean precisely is that housework as work is productive in the Marxian sense, that is, in producing surplus-value." (Dalla Costa and James 1975 p.53).

Seccombe's analysis was frequently lumped together and dismissed with Dalla Costa and James' on the basis that both proposed that domestic labour created value, whether just 'value', or surplus-value. This was unfortunate. Dalla Costa and James' political economy was crude and easily refuted. They simply asserted that domestic labour produces surplus-value because it is 'productive'. No explanation as to why this should be the case was given beyond the fact that domestic labour reproduces the commodity labour-power. Their analysis is a good example of the functionalist approach characteristic of the Debate as a whole. Heavy emphasis is placed upon demonstrating that capital benefits from women's domestic labour through the 'production of surplus-value'. Capital thus 'exploits' women in the home. Seccombe's analysis, though incorrect, is a far more sophisticated version of the value thesis and it is for this reason that I concentrate on his positions rather than Dalla Costa and James'.

(5) For other versions of the 'value thesis' see Dalla Costa and James (1975) (see note 4 above); Inman (1940, 1942) (discussed in the text); Blumenfeld and Mann (1980) (an analysis broadly similar to Seccombe's).

(6) Mandel's analysis of the role of domestic labour in the period of 'late capitalism' is discussed in Chapter Six. See Mandel (1980).

(7) Thus, for example, Jean Gardiner states:

> "Firstly, because commodities bought with the male worker's wage are not in a finally consumable form and housework is necessary to convert the commodities into regenerated labour power, this labour performed by the housewife is one part of the total labour embodied in the worker, the other part being labour embodied in commodities bought with the wage. This point is straightforward and uncontroversial, once one accepts that domestic labour is a necessary component of the labour required to maintain and reproduce labour-power. The problem arises when we go on from here to ask what the connection is between domestic labour performed and the value of labour-power; and whether and how it is possible to measure the contribution of domestic labour in value terms." (Gardiner 1975 pp.48-49).

(8) There are those who do not even accept that domestic labour is use-value production, for example, Avram Landy (1941, 1943) and Linda Briskin (1980). In his polemic against Mary Inman, Landy argued that domestic labour is part of the process of 'individual consumption'; it is not part of 'social production' and does not constitute a 'production process'. Linda Briskin maintains that:

> "Domestic labour <u>actualizes</u> or <u>transforms</u> use-values, but it does not create them." (Briskin 1980 p.160).

(9) See, for example: Landy (1941, 1943), Coulson et al (1975), Adamson et al (1976), Briskin (1980), Bradby (1982).

(10) Within Marxism generally this point is not, of course, undisputed. Mandel, who supports the view that Capital Volume One opens with an analysis of simple commodity production, refers to the critics thus:

> "Objections have been advanced - by early Russian Marxist authors like Bogdanov, by later commentators like Rubin and by contemporary Marxists like Lucio Colletti and Louis Althusser - to the view, originating with Engels and held by Rosa Luxemburg, to which I subscribe, that Marx's Capital provides not only a basic analysis of the capitalist mode of production, but also significant comments upon the whole historical period which includes essential phenomena of petty commodity production." (Mandel 1976 p.14).

This dispute has a further bearing upon arguments advanced in the Domestic Labour Debate as we shall see further on.

(11) In relation to the article by Adamson et al, Paul Smith has noted the following:

> "It has since transpired (see Revolutionary Communist

Papers No. 1, 1977, p.48) that the relevant section of this last article (Adamson et al, 1976, pp.7-14) was written by David Yaffe. It seems appropriate, then, to acknowledge the influence of Yaffe's earlier work, in particular 'Value and price in Marx's Capital' in Revolutionary Communist No. 1, pp.31-49." (Smith 1978 pp.215-216).

(12) The difference between Landy and Adamson et al is that the former sought to deny that domestic labour is a type of 'production' of any kind, while the latter sought to demonstrate that it is a form of production, but not a form of commodity production.

(13) See, also: Cowl (1972) and Fee (1976).

(14) See note (10) above. On this question, see also an important footnote by Seccombe in his article The Expanded Reproduction Cycle of Labour Power in Twentieth-century Capitalism (1980(b) pp.259-261).

(15) This follows a change of position on Seccombe's part:

> "Does the law of value have an impact upon domestic labour? In my first article, I answered no to this question. I made the mistake of equating the law of value with the direct organisation of the labour process by capital and equating abstract labour with proletarian labour." (Seccombe 1980(b) p.223).

On the question of the operation of the law of value, see also Chapter Two, section ten.

(16) See notes (4) and (5) above.

(17) Mary Inman's analysis, while not a full blown value thesis, contains within it the same mistake:

> "In the production of life, under capitalism, the value of the commodities consumed by the worker's family, and the value of the labour-power of the wife expended upon them to render them consumable, reappear again on the market, but in a new form, as the commodity labour-power." (Inman 1942 p.45: my emphasis).

(18) Several contributors to the debate have correctly made this point, for example, Ira Gerstein:

> "...the categories of productive and unproductive labour are simply not applicable to domestic work. These categories refer to wage-labour that either does or does not produce surplus-value for a capitalist." (Gerstein 1973 pp.114-115).

(19) In the concretisation of Marx's schema, it is, in my view, necessary to maintain his assumption that labour-power exchanges at its value. (see note 29, Chapter Two).

Notes - Chapter Five

(1) One of the few contributors to the Domestic Labour Debate to consider the actual historical development of domestic labour is Bruce Curtis. In his article, Capital, the State and the Origins of the Working Class Household (1980) he also makes the point that household labour was an objectively necessary form of production in the early stages of capitalist development:

> "The uneven development of capitalism largely necessitates the private production of the elements of working class subsistence. In the first place, the penetration of capital into certain branches of social production historically leads to the proletarianisation of the population. The economic basis of the household as a coterminous unit of production and reproduction is destroyed. People are thrown onto the labour market and become dependent upon the commodity market for acquiring the means of subsistence. Yet capital, which destroyed the independent household by capitalizing one of the forms of production contained in it, does not penetrate all branches of production at the same rate. Such basic elements of the existence of the working class as food and clothing were not produced by capital on a mass basis until the twentieth

century. Capital destroyed the economic basis of the domestic unit as it had existed, yet preserved the necessity of domestic labour for the reproduction of the working class." (Curtis 1980 p.129).

(2) See, for example, E.J. Hobsbawm (1964), H.F. Moorhouse (1978), H. Pelling (1979).

(3) The figure for 1851 would seem to indicate that employed working class wives were already a minority by mid-century even if middle and upper class wives, the majority of whom had long since ceased both paid and unpaid work, are excluded from the number. However, the degree to which the 1851 census figures, and earlier official statistics, accurately reflect the participation of married women in paid employment is open to question. Sally Alexander (1976) examined in 1851 data and concluded that many female occupations were either seriously under-represented or not recorded at all. Focusing on the figures for London she argues convincingly that the proportion of married women in employment far exceeded the recorded number. Wives escaped the records for various reasons, the most important of which was the intermittent, casual and informal nature of much of their wage work. Especially amongst the large semi and unskilled sections of the working class, women's paid labour was essential to family survival in the first half of the century:

"Women (and children) of this class always had to

> contribute to the family income, indeed, in the 1830s and 1840s, a time of severe economic hardship, the London poor drew more closely together, and it was often the household and not the individual worker, or even separate families, that was the economic unit. A mixture of washing, cleaning, charring as well as various sorts of home or slop work, in addition to domestic labour, occupied most women throughout their working lives. The diversity and interdeterminancy of this spasmodic, casual and irregular employment was not easily condensed and classified into a Census occupation." (Alexander 1976 p.65).

This suggests that the full-time working class housewife was the exception rather than the rule in the first half of the nineteenth century, although as an urban centre largely untouched by the factory system until late in the century, London probably had an over-representation of the kinds of female occupations most likely to go unrecorded. On the whole though, it seems likely that a far higher percentage of married women nationally were employed throughout the first five decades of the century than the twenty five per cent figure recorded in 1851, and that only a minority of wives were full-time housewives for most or all of their married lives during those years. Marx was certain that large-scale industry brought with it the substitution of female for male workers and the employment of whole families in certain industries:

> "In contrast with the period of manufacture, the division of labour is now based wherever possible, on the employment of women, of children of all ages and of unskilled workers, in short of 'cheap labour'... This is true not only for all large-scale production, whether machinery is employed or not, but also for the so-called domestic industries, whether carried on in the private dwellings of the workers, or in small workshops." (Marx 1976 p.590).

Married women were probably always a minority amongst female factory workers, but a majority in the domestic and slop industries which proliferated alongside the mills, foundries, weaving sheds and coalmines. Factory employment statistics were among the first to be collected and they reveal that single women greatly outnumbered wives, and particularly mothers, in the labour force by the middle of the century:

> "...estimates suggest that in the late 1840s about one in five of all female operatives were married. Of all married women operatives in the Lancashire area in 1851 about one in five had children under one year old." (Oakley 1976 p.40).

If the official statistics under-represent the levels of married women's participation in paid work in the early Victorian period, then the decline of the married woman worker in the second half of the 19th century and the pre-

war years of the 20th century appears all the more dramatic.

(4) In the work of Davidoff and others, emphasis is placed upon the fact that by the turn of the century married women usually stayed in, or sought, employment through sheer economic necessity by the turn of the century: "There was undoubtedly, then, a direct connection between poverty caused by the inability of the husband to meet basic needs and married women's work." (Davidoff 1956 p.167) Widowhood, or the unemployment, illness or inadequate wages of their spouse, were some of the factors which drove women into the labour market. The supplementary, frequently temporary and periodic character of most married women's employment in turn structured the features of their occupations: low paid, unskilled and low status. In her book Women in Modern Industry (1915) B.L. Hutchins put it like this:

> "In youth, marriage may at any time take her out of the economic struggle and render wage-earning superfluous and unnecessary. On the other hand, the sudden pressure of necessity, bereavement, or sickness, or unemployment of husband or breadwinning relative, may throw a woman unexpectedly on the labour market... [this means that women's work is]... subject to considerable interruption and is contingent on the family circumstances, whence it comes about that women may not always need paid work,

> but when they do they often want it so badly that they are ready to take anything they can get." (Hutchins 1915 p.xiii).

There were exceptional groups of married women who continued to work outside the home for reasons other than absolute economic necessity. Women in some branches of the textile industry were such a group; their numbers increased in the second half of the 19th century, though declined in the first half of the 20th. In the Blackburn district, for example, the proportion of married women amongst female operatives increased from 25 per cent in 1851, to 35 per cent in 1871 (Hewitt 1958); in 1901, approximately 40 per cent of all married and widowed women were employed, and by 1911 the proportion was 50 per cent (Stearns 1972). The unique qualities of the women textile workers have been the subject of considerable attention, and it is not necessary to repeat their story here (see for example, Hewitt 1958, Collier 1964, Stearns 1972, Liddington and Norris 1984). Suffice it to say that the women of the textile communities were among the last to accept the domestic ideal:

> "Women in many of these towns could not conceive of confining their lives to home and children... They stayed on in the factory after marriage out of habit and a genuine desire to avoid boredom and loneliness." (Stearns 1972 p.113).

If housewifery was becoming the sole vocation of increasing numbers of working class women towards the end of the 19th century, the specific responsibilities of motherhood were increasingly emphasised as primary amongst women's domestic duties (Oakley 1974, Davidoff 1956, Davin 1978). Oakley argues that the emergence of 'childhood' as an identifiable period of prolonged dependency played a crucial role in moulding the full-time housewife role. During the course of the 19th century, working class children ceased to be regarded as workers and acquired the status of dependents with certain educational rights. Protective legislation was the main instrument by which this change occurred:

> "This legislation eventually resulted in the differentiaton of adult and child roles. The child assumed its modern role of dependent and the function of socialisation was taken over exclusively by the home." (Oakley 1974 p.38).

This had two important consequences for household labour. In the first place, dependent children in the home required the care and attention of a non-employed adult - a full-time 'homemaker'. Secondly, specifically childcare tasks were re-elaborated to extend beyond basic baby and toddler care; childcare became a more specialised branch of domestic labour, and one that was increasingly time-consuming and subject to redefinition and expansion as socially perceived standards of parenthood, but

particularly motherhood, rose (Davin 1978, Ehrenreich and English 1978). This additional weight of childcare tasks and responsibilities was only partially offset by the trend towards smaller families which was evident from the 1870s, and by expanding educational and welfare services in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

(5) Like Humphries, my emphasis is upon the role of class struggle in the development of the working class family. However, Humphries' analysis of the material basis of that family, and thus of the substance of that struggle, differs fundamentally from the one presented in this thesis:

> "The material basis of the proletarian family is theorized in terms of three categories; 1) its role in the provision of a popular support system for non-labouring members of the working class; 2) its role in the limitation of the supply of workers and thus in the determination of the value of labour-power; and, 3) its role in the development of class consciousness and struggle." (Humphries 1977 (b) p.25).

These three categories are then counterposed to domestic labour:

> "...the emphasis on domestic labour and the reproduction cycle of labour-power leads to an

> unbalanced vision of the working class family... It is necessary to <u>begin from a different interpretation of the family as the basic unit of society.</u>" (Humphries 1977(b) p.28: my emphasis).

The problem with this view is that it shifts the focus away from the <u>production</u> activities in the home to distributive activities - the distribution of products between labouring and non-labouring members of the family, and to ideological activities and their connection with the development of class consciousness. Humphries explains this shift by first identifying, correctly, the functionalism characteristic of the Domestic Labour Debate. But she goes on to make the incorrect assumption that the error of the contributors to the Debate is to be explained by their very choice of subject matter, domestic labour, rather than by their method of treatment of that subject matter. Thus she is led to conclude:

> "The positions [in the Domestic Labour Debate]... all suffer from the reductionism involved in analysing the family as a basic economic unit of society, a complex phenomenon, in terms of domestic labour, one aspect of that phenomenon." (Humphries 1977(b) p.27).

It is certainly true that domestic labour is not the only factor determining the economic basis of the proletarian family, and the three categories identified by Humphries undoubtedly play an important role. Nonetheless, from a

Marxist perspective the productive is always primary and only by starting from this real labour activity is it possible to make theoretical sense of these other aspects. Thus, in opposing the functionalism of the Domestic Labour Debate it is necessary not to displace household labour from its central role in the material existence and reproduction of the working class family, but to explain how the working class is obliged to struggle for the right to perform this objectively necessary form of social labour in opposition to the immediate and perceived interests of the capitalist class.

(6) See especially Capital Volume One, Chapter Ten, Section One - The Limits of the Working Day (Marx 1976 pp.340-344).

(7) In an interesting passage concerning the conflicting 'rights' involved in the sale and purchase of the peculiar commodity labour-power, and of the resolution of this conflict through class struggle, Marx says this:

> "The capitalist maintains his rights as purchaser when he tries to make the working day as long as possible, and where possible, to make two working days out of one. On the other hand, the peculiar nature of the commodity sold implies a limit to its consumption by the purchaser, and the worker maintains his right as a seller when he wishes to reduce the working day to a particular normal length.

> There is here therefore an antinomy of right against right, both equally bearing the seal of the law of exchange. Between equal rights, force decides. Hence in the history of capitalist production, the establishment of a norm for the working day presents itself as a struggle over the limits of that day, a struggle between collective capital, i.e. the class of capitalists, and collective labour, i.e. the working class." (Marx 1976 p.344).

Notes - Chapter Six

1) Two particularly interesting earlier texts are those by two American economists, Hazel Kyrk and Margaret Reid. See their respective books, Economic Problems of the Family (1929), and Economics of Household Production (1934).

2) In her fascinating book, The Grand Domestic Revolution (1982), Dolores Hayden uncovers a 'materialist feminist' tradition associated with women like Catharine Beecher, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Charlotte Perkins Gilman:

> "I call them material feminists because they dared to define a 'grand domestic revolution' in women's material conditions. They demanded economic remuneration for women's unpaid household labour. They proposed a complete spatial transformatin of the spatial design and material culture of American

homes, neighbourhoods, and cities. While other feminists campaigned for political or social change with philosophical or moral arguments, the material feminists concentrated on economic and spatial issues as the basis of material life." (Hayden 1982 p.1).

3) Thomas and Zmroczek note:

"A recent survey reports that on average a fully automatic washing machine is used for four-and-a-half wash-loads a week, comprising some seventy-seven articles, and this increases substantially when young children are present in the household and even more if they are babies." (Thomas and Zmroczek 1985 p.121).

4) Time-use, or time-budget/time-allocation studies specifically concerned with labour and other activities in the home, are a 20th century phenomenon. The use of such techniques to measure industrial labour has a longer history.

"Time allocation studies have their conceptual roots in the study of labour conditions during early industrialistion in 18th century France and England, in particular in the sociological concepts of Frederic Le Play." (Minge-Klevana 1980 p.279).

5) Time-use studies measuring household labour-time vary

greatly not only in scale (from international to very small localised studies) but in their conceptual definitions, methods of measurement, and objects of study. Comparability is therefore problematical, although more recent studies have been designed with comparability in mind. The majority of studies examine women's household labour-time, and specifically the labour-time of married women with and without children. Most are based on urban and suburban populations. A few studies look at male household labour-time (but not usually the husbands' of female respondents) (Szalai 1972, Meissner et al 1975, Walker 1969). The activities designated 'housework', 'household labour', 'domestic labour', or 'homemaking' vary between studies, for example, some include childcare, some include outdoor tasks like gardening, car repair and so on. Data collection methods also vary considerably. Diaries recording activities at regular intervals have been used. Other forms of record keeping are sometimes used, or respondents may have to recall the time taken in certain activities in interviews. Some studies record only the 'primary' activity engaged in at any given time, others record primary and secondary activities carried on at the same time (for example, cooking and childcare). Methods of data processing and statistical analysis also differ from study to study.

6) In her book A Woman's Work is Never Done (1982), Caroline Davidson notes the findings of three small-scale British studies:

"The earliest, in 1934, was based on 1,250 urban working-class wives. It showed that the majority got up at 6.30 am and went to bed between 10 and 11 pm, after spending 12 - 14 hours on their feet attending to housework and children. It did not, unfortunately, attempt to differentiate between the two activities or determine how much time was spent on different domestic tasks.

"The second, conducted by the Electrical Association for Women in 1935, was based on an unstated but relatively small number of working-class housewives who had the good fortune to live in fully electrified homes. Although it was part of a propaganda exercise designed to promote electricity, it turned out that women who lived in ideal conditions spent a considerable amount of time on housework: 49.19 hours a week or 7 hours a day. This broke down into 15.50 hours a week on cleaning, 14.20 on cooking, 7.53 on washing-up, 6.43 on mending and sewing, and 5.53 on laundry.

"A more rigorous survey, this time of 76 working-class housewives carried out in 1948, did much to confirm the findings of the 1934 study. For it showed that the average housewife's weekday consisted of about twelve hours' work, 4 hours' leisure and 8 hours' sleep. The time spent on housework varied

slightly, according to family circumstances. The woman without any children spent an average of 9.3 hours a day on general housework, laundry, food preparation and consumption, mending, shopping and animal care. As she also spent 2.2 hours in outside employment, her total working day was 11.5 hours long. The mother with one child had a slightly longer working day of 11.8 hours: but the 1.2 hours she spent on childcare and the 2.4 she put in on her job meant that she spent slightly less time (8.2 hours) on housework. With two children rather than one, the housewife worked 12.3 hours a day: she spent 9.2 hours doing housework, 1.8 looking after children and 1.3 earning money. However, once a woman had three or more chldren she only worked an 11.6 hour day. Of all the women in the survey, she spent the least amount of time on housework (7.9 hours) and on work outside the home (1.0) and the most on childcare (2.7)." (Davidson, 1983, pp.191-192).

The three studies cited by Davidson are, respectively, Working-class Wives by Margery Spring Rice (1939), Report on Electricity in working-class homes by Elsie E. Edwards, Electrical Association for Women (1935), and Social research: the dairy method by C.A. Moser (1950).

Notes - Chapter Seven

1) Of course, it is important not to underestimate the level of married women's employment at this time. Both the type of paid work frequently engaged in by married women, and the intermittent character of their employment meant that much of it was not officially recorded. For two useful studies see: Clementina Black, Married Women's Work (1915); Leonore Davidoff, The Employment of Married Women in England 1850-1950 (1956). (See also note (5), Chapter Five).

2) See, for example: Anna Martin The Married Working Woman: A study (1911); Mrs Pember Reeves Round About A Pound A Week (1913); Clementina Black Married Women's Work (1915); B. L. Hutchins Women in Modern Industry (1915); Margery Spring Rice Working Class Wives (1939, republished 1981).

3) This historical change in what constitutes 'necessary' use-values required for the reproduction of labour-power relates to Marx's 'historical and moral' element in the determination of the value of the commodity labour-power (Marx 1976). See the concluding section of Chapter Two.

4) An interesting organisation which promoted the use of electricity in the home from the perspective of its benefits for women was the Electrical Association for Women (E.A.W.). Caroline Davidson briefly discusses the

work of the E.A.W. and concludes:

> "The E.A.W. thus has a significance that overrides the practical importance of its work: it is the only example of women actually changing the conduct of housework through collective action during the three centuries covered in this book [1650-1950]." (Davidson 1982 p.43).

5) This, of course, was related to the contemporary interest in 'scientific management' in general, and 'domestic sience' in particular. For interesting discussions of these important social and ideological trends see: Barbara Ehrenrich and Deidre English For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Expert's Advice to Women (1978); Dolores Hayden The Grand Domestic Revolution (1982); Susan M. Strasser The Business of Housekeeping: The Ideology of the Household at the Turn of the Twentieth Century (1978).

6) Several of the Feminist and Labour studies referred to were motivated out of a concern for the health of working class women. Margery Spring Rice's study Working Class Wives (1939), for example, was conducted for the Women's Health Enquiry Committee.

Notes - Chapter Eight

1) It is in this context that the 'functionality' of the working class family for capital and men does play an important role. For example, it could be argued that the capitalist state could concede the right of the adequate reproduction of labour-power through domestic labour not simply because machinery, as opposed to the cheap labour of women and children, had become the main lever of accumulation, but also because there were obvious gains to be made from the entrenchment of the sexual division of labour on economic, political and ideological grounds. However, it follows from my critique of functionalism in both its Marxist and Feminist varieties, that these are secondary and not fundamentally determining factors in analysing the historical development of household labour. Although these secondary factors are important, they lie outside the scope of this thesis.

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